

# Look Beyond My Scribbles

Speaking Out On Dyslexia

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“My wife reads my textbooks to me,” said Gary Hill, a 33-year-old student at University of Washington, Tacoma (UWT) who will graduate in March of this year.

Hill has a learning disability, specifically with reading, which subsequently has an impact on his writing. The general public knows it as dyslexia.

“I dictate my papers, and my wife writes them for me,” Hill said. “I can’t spell.”

For dyslexic students and the faculty and staff at UWT, understanding the nature of this neurological disorder and knowing ways to deal with it can make a big difference in the quality and depth of the learning experience for such students here at the university.

“If students are struggling in any way, it could really be helpful to come talk to me,” said Lisa Tice, manager of Disability Support Services (DSS) at UWT. “I’m the focal point for facilitating the kind of support that students may need.”

Students should make an appointment with DSS and start the process of registration for accommodations as soon as possible, advises Tice. Before DSS can provide accommodations, a student must submit documentation of their learning disability.

The university does not provide diagnostic evaluations of disabilities and so a diagnostic report must be obtained from a licensed psychologist, although DSS does have a list of recommended specialists.

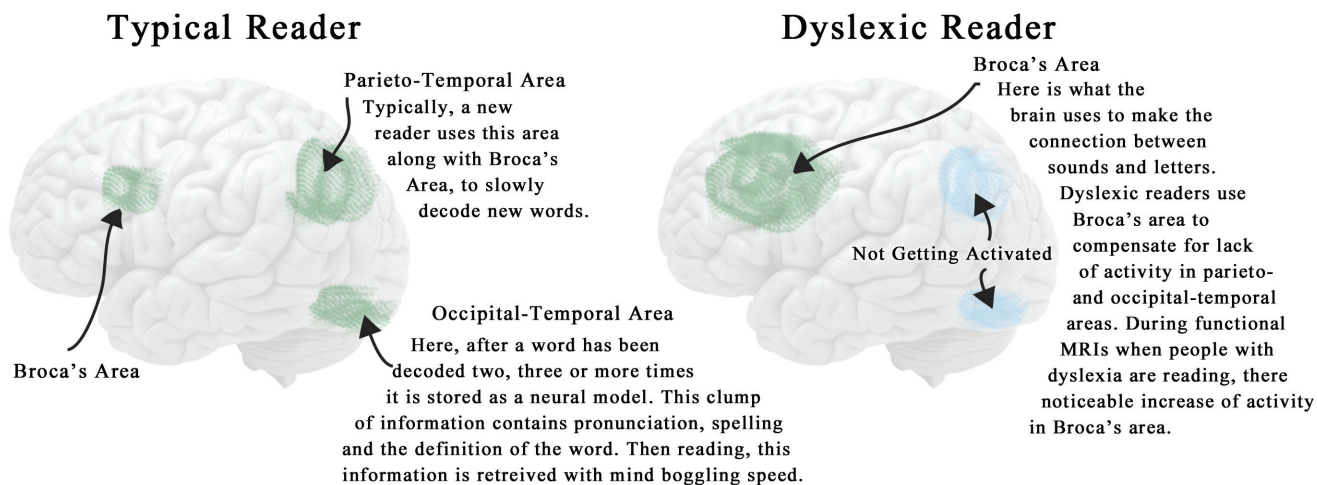
Some of the areas in which the psychologist evaluates a student are aptitude, achievement, information processing, and memory to assess whether or not dyslexia is present.

This is helpful in defining the support needs a student might need. It also can help the student understand more clearly what they are dealing with in their reading struggles. Dyslexia does not manifest exactly the same for each person.

What a person sees who has dyslexia varies with individuals. It is not the same for everyone. Some letter or words might be backwards. Some of the text might seem to wiggle or jump around the page. Letters such as p and b, or q and d might be difficult to differentiate. Sometimes the letters and words look fine but someone with dyslexia could feel nauseus or get a headache while trying to read. At times it might be that there is difficulty connecting the sounds the letters make to the letters. Sometimes, for someone with dyslexia, it is like they have never seen that word before. Even though they just read it on the previous page. All this has nothing to do with a dyslexic person's intellectual capacity.

If a student qualifies for support services, the DSS manager determines how best to meet a student’s disability related needs. Books on tape, note takers, and accommodations regarding examination arrangements are some of the services offered, according to Tice.

## TYPICAL BRAIN vs. DYSLEXIC BRAIN WHEN READING



An example would be if a student was taking a course that has in-class writing assignments. Tice can arrange an accommodation so that a dyslexic student can have double time or time and a half to accomplish the assignment.

“There are ways that students can be supported to take a class like that,” Tice said. “If that’s a subject they are interested in.”

Such accommodations can be critical to success for dyslexic students. Getting through course content at the pace normally expected in college level work for students with this disorder can be an enormous challenge.

This is not because dyslexia makes it difficult for an individual to comprehend concepts and ideas. It is actually a problem with decoding and storing of words in the brain, according to results from research done at Yale University School of Medicine.

“Other intellectual abilities - thinking, reasoning, understanding - are untouched by dyslexia,” said Shaywitz in her book “Overcoming Dyslexia.”

Research done at Yale University School of Medicine using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) has made it possible for scientists to map the brain and watch what parts are activated while reading text on a page.

It is important to note, however, that not everyone who has trouble with reading fast and efficiently has dyslexia. For some students, it is a matter of poor instruction in their early years in school, according to Dr. Marcy Stein, UWT professor in the Education program.

Regardless of whether a student has dyslexia or not, if they have trouble with reading, tutoring and finding learning strategies that work can be key factors to success in the classroom.

“Students have to learn how to study,” Stein said. “They need to be involved with the content.”

Stein also recommends graphic organizers and working with partners in the class to help students master the material.

Graphic organizers use pictorial ways to represent complex information and can make abstract ideas more concrete, using paper or an electronic pad.

Dyslexic students as well as faculty and staff at UWT may find that such suggestions could benefit their family members who have this learning disability.

If that family member is a child, it is important to note that appropriate intervention done in the early years, especially before third grade, is vital and can make a significant difference in the child's educational experience.

It is possible to actually reorganize the brain and help a child to develop the area that stores words, which is critical for fluent reading, according to Shaywitz.

If parents are unsure but suspect a reading disability, they are advised to get their child assessed and do not wait.

"Anyone, including parents, can refer a child for assessment through the school district if there is a concern that the child might have a learning disability," said Diane Holt, principal of Green Gables Elementary.

If a child is determined to have dyslexia, parents should ask questions about what reading strategies are being used in the classroom, according to Holt. These strategies should include work with phonetics and rhyming.

"Children should love reading," Holt said. "If they hate reading and it's a struggle, then you want to be making sure that it is well supported in the classroom and that the home environment is supporting what the teacher is doing."

Parents and teachers need to be working on the same strategies, Holt stressed.

Understanding of the nature of dyslexia and appropriate intervention could have made a difference for someone such as Hill.

Hill learned the name of his reading disability in sixth grade and did get some help special education classes. But, by that time he was so far behind that he struggled just to pass the rest of

his middle and high school years, with no support from home.

His parents told him he was dumb and should plan on working in construction since he was good with his hands, Hill said.

Now, 15 years after high school, he is graduating from UWT and will be attending City University to accomplish his lifelong dream of earning his teaching certification.

He hopes to help other children, especially those with learning disabilities, to have what he did not have as a child in school, a positive and rich learning experience.

"I wanted the teachers to look beyond my scribbles," Hill said. "I wanted to say, hey, look I'm a person."

#### Resources

The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity  
International Dyslexia Association