Studying with developmental dysphasia
Facts & Figures, Focus points, Tips and Tricks

1. Facts & Figures

☐ Developmental dysphasia is a developmental disorder of speech and language with deficits in different linguistic components such as vocabulary and grammar despite intensive individual speech therapy.

☐ In Belgium about 3% of the children have developmental dysphasia. Symptoms can persist in higher education.

☐ Students with developmental dysphasia in higher education can have strong difficulties with:

- ☐ processing linguistic information such as auditory attention, memory, comprehension of instructions, the comprehension of abstract and figurative language.

- ☐ oral communication such as recalling words from long term memory (expressed in problems with word retrieval), vocabulary, making grammatically correct sentences, story-telling, reduced spontaneity.

- ☐ Metalinguistic awareness such as word and sentence analysis, foreign languages and phonological awareness.

- ☐ Inner speech causing problems with planning, organization, carelessness and forgetfulness.

☐ Developmental dysphasia can also have an impact on the socio-emotional well-being. Fear of failure and stress are common.

☐ Comorbidity (the cooccurrence of disorders) and other developmental disorders is high. The most common comorbid disorder is dyslexia.

2. Focus points, Tips and Tricks

☐ Attending classes

Focus points

☐ Due to the language problems taking structured notes is difficult.

☐ Because of difficulties in discriminating main issues from side issues and finding coherence in information, the outline of the lecture can sometimes be missed. This can lead to difficulties with taking notes.

☐ New words need iteration in order to capture them correctly.

☐ Correct and structured communication with peers and lecturers can be challenging.

Tips and tricks

☐ The use of clear and unambiguous language, a structured syllabus with clear learning goals, and a PowerPoint that is made available online before class, facilitate the distinction between main issues and side issues and taking notes.

☐ PowerPoint presentations with adequate structure, synoptic lay-out, fonts sans serif, (= without thin horizontal lines at the end of the letters, such as Arial or Calibri) in font size 24 facilitate reading and taking notes.

☐ Making notes on a laptop is often easier because the spelling checker and reading software can be used.

☐ Lecture recordings that are made available online after class, offer the opportunity to review difficult passages and complete notes.

☐ Training in taking notes can have added value.

☐ Copies of notes of fellow students can have substantial added value in addition to their own notes.

☐ Lecture recordings that are made available online after class, offer the opportunity to review difficult passages and complete notes.

☐ Information and practical agreements on the course of the lecture and the rules of conduct and communication can play an effective supportive role (how to contact the lecturer with questions during and

after class, through email, …). Most often there is a preference to communicate via email.

☐ Planning and organizing study-related activities

Focus points

☐ Often more time is needed to process the course content and assignments leading to difficulties with study planning.

Tips and tricks

☐ Providing an overview of all assignments and tasks helps to create an overview and make an efficient study plan.

☐ During a training in time management and study coaching planning skills and time management skills can be enhanced.

☐ Processing and rehearsing study materials

Focus points

☐ Processing large amounts of linguistic information takes time and energy, even more so in foreign languages.

☐ The identification and coherence in the course materials is difficult.

☐ Abstract materials and practical applications are perceived as more difficult. Information is likely to be interpreted literally.

☐ Self-testing strategies can be less well developed.

Tips and tricks

☐ Stating the learning goals very explicitly and providing sample questions can be useful to help process the content and enhance self- testing strategies.

☐ Explicitly verbalizing the link between the learning content and the work field on a regular basis can help make the transfer between theory and practice.

☐ Study coaching can be meaningful to help develop strategies to discriminate main issues from side issues.

☐ Support in specific subject matters and the use of word lists and a grammar rule book can be supportive.

☐ Assignments

Focus points

- ☐ Interpreting instructions of an assignment correctly and defining the expectations can be difficult. Information is likely to be interpreted very literally.
- ☐ Applications can be hard. Large assignments such as bachelor or master theses can be overwhelming.
- ☐ Getting an assignment ready in time and formulating a structured answer can be challenging.
- ☐ Conveying a message in a concise and coherent manner can be a focus point.
- ☐ Language problems can hamper the comprehension of an assignment or instruction.
- ☐ Limited correction and test strategies increase the number of errors, specifically in case of immediate submission. Self-written texts contain a lot of errors, are less structured and are less pleasant to read despite the fact that a lot of time is invested in writing these texts.
- ☐ Due to restricted verbal skills presentations and group assignments are challenging.

Tips and tricks

- ☐ Giving clear and unambiguous instructions can play an effective supportive role in helping understand the assignment and identify the expectations.
- ☐ Instructions on the extensiveness of the assignment, for example how many pages are required, help to make the expectations more concrete.
- ☐ Besides elaborating on the assignment in class, the instructions are also best given in writing.
- ☐ Checking whether the assignment was understood correctly is supportive.

- ☐ Agreements should be made on how to contact the lecturer in case of questions (after class, via email, digitally, …).
- ☐ Postponing deadlines can be necessary in some cases.
- ☐ For large assignments such as a bachelor- or master theses extra intermediate and explicit feedback can be necessary. Breaking down the assignment and providing extra clarification for each of the components can also play an effective supporting role.
- ☐ For oral presentations it is best to implement a growth path (e.g. at the beginning of the study program the recording of the presentation on video, in a next step before a small group, finally in a larger group).
- ☐ For reading and writing tasks sufficient time should be calculated.
- ☐ Applying adequate tools such as dictionaries, spelling control, word predictors and reading software can increase the level of correction substantially.
- ☐ Offering a training in writing skills can be supportive to learn how to structure texts.
- ☐ A distinction should be made between immediate and delayed submission. In case of delayed submission the correction level can be enhanced because assistive tools or support can be applied. In case of immediate submission an adapted rating is important provided this is not in contradiction with the learning goals.
- ☐ An empathetic attitude during presentations (e.g. giving time to find a word) and focusing on the content is supportive.

☐ Exams

Focus points

- ☐ Due to the slow information processing, the provided time can be insufficient to prepare and/or answer all the questions.
- ☐ The comprehension of assignment or instructions can be hampered.
- ☐ Written exams contain many errors and are less structured, which makes them less pleasant to read.

- [ ] Due to the slow information processing exam periods can be perceived as very strenuous.

Tips and tricks

- [ ] Providing sample questions and model answers can help prepare for an exam.
- [ ] Formulating clear and unambiguous questions helps understand the question correctly.
- [ ] Rephrasing questions helps verify whether the question is understood correctly.
- [ ] Guidelines on the expected length of the exam or the response help concretize the expectations.
- [ ] Rephrasing questions helps verify whether the question is understood correctly.
- [ ] Extra preparation time at an oral or written exam allow to compensate for the slow information processing.
- [ ] During written exams a laptop with compensating software can be used so questions can be read out loud and the spelling checker can be used.
- [ ] An additional oral presentation at a written exam can helps to clarify the responses and eliminate ambiguities.
- [ ] An optimal spread of exams within an exam period can compensate for the overload and slower processing speed.

- [ ] Internships

Focus points

- [ ] Adjusting to the new setting with its specific expectations can be very demanding.
- [ ] During meetings the student can show reticence when it comes to asking questions and may seem not eager to learn.
- [ ] During the internship writing reports can be problematic. The high number of reports that have to be made in a short period of time, lead to more errors and overload.

Tips and tricks

- ☐ Making the expectations of the internship concrete and getting acquainted with the setting of the internship beforehand can play an effective supporting role. Uncertainties can be clarified and additional information can be requested.
- ☐ Explicitly verbalizing the link between the study content and the work field on a regular basis can play an effective supporting role.
- ☐ For writing and reading tasks sufficient time should be provided.
- ☐ Adequate tools such as compensating software, dictionaries, spellings checkers, can enhance the work pace, the accuracy level and the correction level.
- ☐ The spelling and grammar in written reports or assignments should be reviewed.
- ☐ During a training in time management, skills on how to calculate sufficient revision and correction time for written assignments can be taught. Not only for writing tasks but also for reading tasks, sufficient time should be provided.

☐ Student life

Focus points

- ☐ Additional problems such as fatigue, stress, anxiety and low self-esteem are possible.

Tips and tricks

- ☐ A fixed contact person in the study program can help monitor the load limit and help look for solutions in case of difficulties.
- ☐ Staff members of student facilities provide coaching in case of psycho-social problems.