Studying with dyslexia
Facts & Figures, Focus points, Tips and Tricks

1. Facts & Figures

☐ Dyslexia is a learning disability characterized by a persistent problem in reading and/or writing accurately and/or fluently.

☐ In Belgium about 3 to 10% of the population has dyslexia. In higher education the percentage of students with dyslexia is estimated at 2%.

☐ The presence of the disorder is strongly related to the structure of the language. Dyslexia is less common in transparent languages where there is a clear one-on-one relationship between sound and character e.g. Finnish.

☐ Students with dyslexia in higher education have strong difficulties with reading and/or spelling tasks:

   ☐ Next to a slower reading speed, more errors are read, both in Dutch as in other languages.

   ☐ The spelling problems are more pronounced then the reading problems. Typical dyslexia errors do not exist. Spelling errors are common in all spelling categories. Even phonological errors (writing words as you hear them) are still common.

   ☐ Texts are often less structured and contain more grammatical errors. Errors in punctuation and capital use are common. Texts are often less pleasant to read.

   ☐ Listening and taking notes simultaneously is difficult and can lead to chaotic and incomplete notes.

☐ Besides problems with reading, writing and spelling other associated problems can occur such as problems with verbal memory, phonological awareness, mental calculation, working memory and general processing speed. Processing information and applying test- and correction strategies, planning and study focus require more effort.

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

2. Focus points, Tips and Tricks

☐ Attending classes

Focus points

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

☐ Reading aloud and taking notes on a whiteboard required great effort.

Tips and tricks

☐ 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. Tables and figures are best provided with a clear title and lay-out.

☐ PowerPoint presentations delivered before classes facilitate following classes and taking structured notes on the hand-outs. The PowerPoint presentation can be read in advance using compensating software.

☐ 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 classes, 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.

☐ Planning and organizing study-related activities

Focus points

☐ Often more time is needed to go through the course material and process the information.

☐ Problems with planning skills and time management hinder making up a realistic 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

☐ Inefficient study strategies can hamper the discrimination between key issues and side issues and a fluent processing of information.

☐ Links between present knowledge and new information are not always made.

Tips and tricks

☐ Course materials with sufficient structure, synoptic lay-out, using design templates, and fonts sans serif, (= without thin horizontal lines at the end of the letters, such as Arial or Calibri) in font size 12 with a line spacing of 1,5 increase reading comfort and information processing.

☐ Compensating software can be used to read the course materials and enhance the processing of the information. Delivering course materials in digital format is essential.

☐ Offering study coaching where the focus lies on learning techniques that help discriminate key issues from side issues, making connections, structuring texts, memorizing course materials efficiently can enhance learning outcomes.

☐ Assignments

Focus points

☐ Reading problems can hamper the comprehension of assignments or instructions.

☐ Getting an assignment ready in time and formulating a structured answer can be challenging.

☐ 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.

Tips and tricks

☐ Next to an oral explanation the assignment should be given in writing.

☐ Checking whether the assignment was understood is supportive.

☐ 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 better 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.

☐ Adjusted deadlines can be necessary.

☐ Agreements should be made on how to contact the lecturer in case of questions (after class, via email, digitally, …).

☐ Exams

Focus points

☐ Due to the slower reading speed and slow information processing, the provided time can be insufficient to prepare and/or answer all the questions.

☐ Due to the slower reading speed and the many reading errors, understanding an 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 slower reading speed and slow information processing exam periods can be perceived as very strenuous.

Tips and tricks

☐ Extra preparation time at an oral or written exam allows to compensate for the slow reading speed, the writing problems and the slower processing skills.

☐ 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 help clarify the responses and eliminate ambiguities.

☐ An optimal spread of exams within an exam period can help accommodate for the cognitive overload and the slower processing time.

☐ Internships

Focus points

☐ 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

☐ 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.