

Dyslexia FAQ

From Overcoming Dyslexia by Dr. Sally Shaywitz (Vintage, 2005)

MYTH

Dyslexia is a visual problem; Dyslexic children and adults see and write letters and words backwards. If a child does not reverse B's and D's or p's and q's, he or she cannot be dyslexic.

TRUTH

Dyslexia is fundamentally a problem in spoken language – it is not a visual problem. Many children reverse their letters when learning to write, regardless of whether or not they have dyslexia.

MYTH

Dyslexia only affects boys.

TRUTH

Both males and females can be dyslexic. In a study published in 1990 in the Journal of the American Medical Association, the Shaywitz' demonstrated that dyslexia affects comparable numbers of boys and girls. Although more boys are referred by their teachers for evaluation, these referrals appear to reflect the more rambunctious behavior of boys in the classroom.

MYTH

Smart people can't be dyslexic; if you are dyslexic, you can't be very smart.

TRUTH

Some of the very brightest boys and girls struggle to read. Dyslexia occurs at all levels of intelligence – average, above average, and highly gifted. Many gifted people at the top of their fields are dyslexic.

MYTH

People who are dyslexic are unable to read.

TRUTH

Most commonly, dyslexic children and adults do learn to read; the problem is the effort required to read. Typical readers of the same ability level early on become "fluent" readers so that reading is automatic, fast, and pleasurable. In contrast, dyslexic children remain "manual" readers who read slowly and with great effort.

MYTH

There are no clues to dyslexia before a child enters school.

TRUTH

Since reading is based on spoken language, clues to a possibility of dyslexia are present before a child enters school. Children with dyslexia often have slightly delayed speech, don't recognize rhyming words and there is often a family history of reading difficulties. Tests can be performed early on, and, thus help can come earlier and many difficulties may be prevented.

MYTH

If you perform well in school, you can't be dyslexic.

TRUTH

Some dyslexics perform very well in school; these students are highly motivated and work incredibly hard; many have received the necessary accommodations, either formally or informally, that allowed them to demonstrate their knowledge. Dyslexic students have completed rigorous programs at highly selective colleges, graduate and professional schools.