

Understanding Dysgraphia

Big Picture Characteristics of Dysgraphia

Individuals with dysgraphia may have difficulty with one or more of the following skills.

- Forming letters, numbers and words
- Spelling
- Organizing information from memory
- Getting words onto paper through writing or typing

Symptoms of Dysgraphia

Symptoms of dysgraphia can be seen in 6 different areas: fine motor, visual-spatial, language processing, spelling/handwriting, grammar, and organization of language. The number of symptoms and severity will vary by student. The following checklist can be used to identify common symptoms of dysgraphia.

Checklist

- Tight or awkward pencil grip
- Writing posture is awkward (wrist, arm, body position, paper position)
- Illegible writing
 - Letters aren't formed consistently
 - Letters have odd start points and the student uses odd pencil strokes
 - Letters float above or below the line
 - Letter heights are inconsistent
 - Slant of letters are inconsistent
 - Spacing between letters and/or between words are inconsistent or nonexistent
 - Has trouble writing within margins
 - Difficulty tracing, cutting food, coloring inside the lines, tying shoes or doing puzzles
- Older students may have trouble texting and typing
- Shape discrimination and/or difficulty drawing or reproducing a shape
- Difficulty organizing words on paper in left to right fashion
- Copies written material slowly (needs extra time when copying)
- Doesn't write fluently (getting ideas on paper takes longer than it should)
- Has trouble sequencing thoughts, following multi-step directions and may lose train of thought
- Punctuation is a problem
 - Doesn't remember to use capital letters at the beginning of sentences
 - Commas are overused and verb tenses are mixed up
 - Doesn't write in complete sentences (fragments)
 - Sentences contain many run-ons

- Spelling is a problem
 - Can't tell when words are misspelled
 - May be able to spell correctly out loud but is inaccurate when writing
 - Includes multiple spellings for the same word
 - Doesn't understand spelling generalizations or rules
 - Upper and lowercase letters are mixed up
- Blends printing and cursive
- Has trouble reading their own writing
- Avoids writing and may act out to avoid writing
- Erases a lot
- Writing is exhausting
- Organizing information is difficult
- May leave out important facts and details making the writing vague
- Writing may ramble, be repetitive or provide too much information
- The level at which the student speaks is well above the level they write

Supporting Dysgraphia

Symptoms of dysgraphia will depend on a student's age. Many eventually compensate for difficulties with the physical aspect of writing (letter production, formation, spacing, pencil grip, etc.) yet continue to struggle with other aspects of writing as they get older.

There are numerous ways to support dysgraphia. Most commonly students are provided academic intervention (specialized instruction) and accommodations.

What Kind of Instruction?

Students with dysgraphia need instruction in handwriting (up to a certain age), spelling and writing composition including organization, grammar and usage. Instruction is best when directly modeled, multi-sensory, systematic and explicit.

What Kind of Accommodations?

Accommodations in the form of technology are vital when supporting dysgraphia. Types of technology often used are: speech to text or dictation software, voice recording and web-based graphic organizers. Other accommodations include the use of visuals, anchor papers, prewriting strategies, breaking assignments into manageable pieces, extra time, copies of notes, stressing quality over quantity, not downgrading for spelling, providing a proofreading checklist, and using strategies to self-manage executive functions involved with composition.

Can There be Coexisting Conditions?

Dysgraphia can occur alone or with other conditions. Dysgraphia is not linked to intelligence. Students with dysgraphia can be gifted in other areas. This is known as being, "twice exceptional".