



Sacramento County READS

Understanding Reading Disabilities and Dyslexia



What Are Reading Disabilities and Dyslexia?

Reading disabilities encompass a range of challenges in acquiring reading skills, often due to difficulties with phonological processing, decoding, and fluency. Dyslexia, the most common type, affects word recognition, spelling, and decoding. These difficulties can hinder academic success and self-esteem. About 15–20% of the population has a language-based learning disability, and 70–80% of students in special education for specific learning disabilities struggle with reading. Dyslexia affects all genders and backgrounds equally.

Challenges for Students With Reading Disabilities, Including Dyslexia

- **Phonological Processing Deficits:** Both groups often struggle with recognizing and manipulating the sound structures of language, which is crucial for decoding words.
- **Decoding and Fluency Challenges:** Difficulties in translating written text into spoken words and reading with appropriate speed and expression are common.
- **Working Memory Limitations:** Challenges in holding and manipulating information can affect reading comprehension and the ability to follow multi-step instructions.
- **Comprehension Difficulties:** Struggles with understanding and interpreting text can result from the above deficits.

Evidence-Based Practices for Reading Instruction

To support students with reading disabilities and dyslexia, the following instructional approaches are recommended:

- **Structured Literacy:** This approach is explicit, systematic, and sequential, focusing on phonology, sound-symbol association, syllable instruction, morphology, syntax, and semantics. It benefits all students, especially those with reading difficulties.
- **Multisensory Instruction:** Engaging multiple senses (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile) enhances memory and learning of written language.
- **Explicit Instruction:** Direct teaching of concepts with clear explanations and guided practice helps students grasp complex reading skills.
- **High-Dosage Interventions:** Intensive, frequent instructional sessions can accelerate learning and close achievement gaps.
- **Professional Development for Educators:** Ongoing training ensures teachers are equipped with effective strategies to support students with reading difficulties.

High-quality, evidence-based reading instruction is essential for ensuring that all students — including those with reading disabilities and dyslexia — have equitable opportunities to become proficient, confident readers. Decades of research confirm that systematic, explicit, and comprehensive approaches to reading instruction not only support students with disabilities, but also strengthen literacy outcomes for all learners.

To learn more . . .

[California Dyslexia Guidelines \(CA Dept of Education\)](#)

[Structured Literacy: An Approach Grounded in the Science of Reading](#)

[10 Research-Based Tips for Enhancing Literacy Instruction](#)

[International Dyslexia Association](#)