Exceptional Student Services
Arizona Technical Assistance System
(AZ-TAS)

Specific Learning Disability–Dyslexia:
A Technical Assistance Document to Support
Families and Teachers

2017
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Arizona Department of Education

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Arizona Department of Education
http://www.azed.gov/
Introduction

The Arizona Department of Education is focused on the importance of teaching all our children to read, including those with dyslexia. Progress in reading achievement for all students begins with Arizona’s teachers’ implementing data-based, systematic, and explicit instruction in a multitude of contexts, with many levels of support, each and every day. Educators at all levels must have a deep understanding of reading to pinpoint gaps in student learning.

The United States Department of Education includes dyslexia in its definition of specific learning disability. Federal regulations (34 CFR 300.8 (c)(10) state that under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), “specific learning disability (SLD)” is defined, in part, as “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.”

While dyslexia is not itself an eligibility category under the IDEA, a child’s dyslexia may result in the child’s being determined eligible for special education and related services under the disability category of specific learning disability. If the child requires special education and related services because of the specific learning disability, the child would be eligible to receive services through an individualized education program (IEP). The federal law does not prevent a school psychologist or other qualified evaluator from using the term “dyslexia” to describe how a child’s learning disability manifests, and there is no barrier to using the term to assist a team in describing the learning needs of a student.

However, not every child with dyslexia will qualify for an IEP if the child does not need specially designed instruction. With this in mind, regardless of whether a child has dyslexia or any other condition included in the definition of “specific learning disability,” if a disability is suspected by the public education agency (PEA) where the child is enrolled or the school district where the child resides if the child is not school aged, the PEA must conduct an evaluation to determine whether that child is a child with a disability in need of special education.

Arizona’s emphasis on thorough reading instruction for all children, systems for measuring progress, and the use of data to improve individual reading instruction exists to help all children, especially those with specific reading problems such as dyslexia, become better readers. The next pages discuss how reading instruction in Arizona relies upon these systems to reach readers of all ability levels.
To support this research, this guide will lay out in more detail the essential components of literacy needed for core instruction so that students with reading problems, specific learning disabilities, and/or dyslexia can be successful in accessing the general education curriculum. Effective reading instruction must be explicit and systematic, provide opportunities for practice, and include embedded assessments. Teachers should also be providing students with immediate corrective feedback. Educators must be provided with strong professional development and coaching feedback to enhance their teaching practices and to ensure integrity and fidelity. Visuals showing how instruction can be delivered within a conceptual framework of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) to meet the needs of all learners follow, along with definitions for terms.

Gough and Tumner (1986) proposed the “Simple view of reading” to clarify the role of decoding, or correctly pronouncing written words, in relation to reading comprehension. The researchers expressed the need for educators to teach students to decode expertly as early as possible. When students can decode expertly, their reading comprehension abilities are equivalent to their language comprehension abilities. Students’ learning and their skills in reading and language comprehension are enhanced with strong content knowledge in many domains including science, social studies, math, reading, and writing. However, without mastery in decoding, no amount of language comprehension can increase a child’s reading comprehension.

With the mindset of “Every student can succeed” and an understanding of how the brain learns to read, along with knowledge of best practices in reading instruction, educators can work collaboratively to address the needs of all students. If educators don’t provide struggling readers with targeted interventions, whether within the whole class, in a small group, or individually, those struggling students fall further and further behind as their peers make progress. Educators must work collaboratively in teams, dig deep into data, be receptive to support from reading coaches and other administrators, and be methodical in planning, teaching, and assessing student progress in order to close the achievement gap for struggling readers.
1. **Multi-Tiered System of Supports** ([http://www.azed.gov/mtss/](http://www.azed.gov/mtss/)) – the systematic use of multi-source assessment data to most efficiently allocate resources to improve learning for all students, through integrated academic and behavioral supports. This system includes:

   **Tier 1**: Core academic and behavior instruction and support designed and differentiated for all students in all settings to ensure mastery of the Arizona standards and core instructional goals/expectations.

   **Tier 2**: More focused, targeted instruction/intervention and supplemental support aligned with the standards and core instructional goals/expectations.

   **Tier 3**: Intense intervention based upon individual student need and aligned with core curriculum, instruction, and supplemental supports.

2. **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** – the use of UDL principles and instructional scaffolding to bridge gaps and reduce or eliminate barriers to engagement (academic, behavioral, psychological, social) across all three tiers of instructional intensity and support for flexible, transformative digital instructional materials.


4. **Specially Designed Instruction** – adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under IDEA, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction:

   (i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability and

   (ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the PEA that apply to all children.
Data-Driven Instruction

Having a comprehensive assessment system in place and a team structure to analyze data to guide educators in planning appropriate instruction for all students is a vital framework for teaching reading. The process of analyzing and discussing data in a way that fosters collaboration and generates instructional supports for all students must be put in place and be guided by strong leadership.

Summative – Used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition, and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period. (Examples: end of a project, unit, course, semester, program, or school year)

Universal screener Interim (Predictive) – Administered to and reviewed for all students within the first quarter. (Examples: academic grades, attendance records, discipline referrals, reading/math appraisals, and developmental screeners)

Benchmark Interim (Predictive) – Usually done 3–4 times per year and administered to all students. (Examples: reading/math assessment, CBM, and unit tests)

Diagnostic – Students who are identified as at risk by the universal screener are administered a diagnostic assessment to determine the students’ deficits. (Examples: phonics, phonemic awareness, spelling, number sense, and behavior)

Formative (Check for Understanding) – Used by teachers and students during instruction. Provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning throughout lessons, units, or interventions. (Examples: observations, work samples, and asking and answering questions)

Progress monitoring Interim (Check for Progress) – Students in tier 1 instruction are assessed quarterly; students in tier 2 are assessed every 2–4 weeks; and students in tier 3 are assessed every 1–2 weeks. (Examples: benchmarking, curriculum-based measures, and anecdotal notes)
This handbook is divided into three major sections: (1) definitions and regulations, (2) components of reading instruction, and (3) resources. Each section includes information and supports for families and teachers working in public education agencies to increase the learning outcomes for all students with reading difficulties.

**Section 1: Specific Learning Disability—Dyslexia: From Definitions to Eligibility**

Section one of this handbook supports families and teachers in becoming familiar with definitions and characteristics of students with specific learning disabilities and dyslexia. Early identification is a key to supporting students. The Arizona Department of Education has several resources to ensure that correct supports are in place for all children. Key components of early identification and resources needed for students to receive the specific support early on in their academic career are also included. Section one explains the evaluation process used to determine whether a child meets the eligibility criteria for a student with a specific learning disability with or without the condition of dyslexia.

**Section 2: Essential Components of Reading Instruction**

Section two of the handbook is provided to communicate to families and teachers the essential components of reading instruction so that teachers may support all learners and foster communication around how a child learns to read. This section outlines the components needed to support a strong core of instruction for tier 1, including how the Arizona English Language

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**MTSS Frameworks of Sustainable Support**

Educators can make a difference in supporting the needs of students with specific learning disabilities—dyslexia. For all learners, educational leaders and educators must collaboratively create and cultivate frameworks to build sustainability. Educators must be provided support through professional learning and coaching to thoroughly understand the process in which these frameworks enhance the education of all students. It takes strong leadership to guide, facilitate, and empower teachers to be data driven in their practices. Public education agencies must also understand their population of students and what evidence-based decision making and practices need to be put in place in both curriculum and instruction. A strong assessment system that drives instructional decision making in a collaborative way with intervention in mind is at the heart of instruction. By building capacity and sustainability within these frameworks, PEAs are defining systems and processes and then problem solving through the stages of implementation thereby building integrity and fidelity in their practices to close the achievement gap and support the learning of all students.
Arts (ELA) Standards support the learning of all students, including specific strategies and techniques for students with specific learning disabilities—dyslexia.

Section 3: Additional Resources

Section three has been provided to families and teachers for additional resources and supports; it includes lists of specific websites, books, rubrics, forms, and articles.

For additional technical assistance on recognizing a student with a specific learning disability for the purpose of receiving specially designed instruction, please refer to the following Arizona Department of Education documents:

- AZ-TAS Individualized Education Program (IEP),
- AZ-TAS Evaluation: The Assessment Continuum Guide for Pre-K through Third Grade in Arizona, and

*One thing we know for certain about dyslexia is that it is one small area of difficulty in a sea of strength. Having trouble with reading does not mean that you’ll have trouble with everything. In fact, most children with dyslexia are very good at a lot of other things.*

Sally Shaywitz, MD Overcoming Dyslexia (2003)
Section 1:
Specific Learning Disability–Dyslexia: from Definitions to Eligibility

Section one of this handbook supports families and teachers in becoming familiar with definitions and characteristics associated with specific learning disability and dyslexia.

Definitions

According to the Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) §15-761:

“Specific learning disability” means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or perform mathematical calculations. The term “specific learning disability” includes conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. That term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disabilities, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

Classroom Indications: Each person with SLD has a different combination or cluster of characteristics, which can range from mild to severe. Effective intervention strategies should include a total approach to meeting the educational, psychological, medical, and social needs of the student. Accommodations in the classroom may include extended time, use of a calculator, a reader or person to record answers, or use of an audio recording device for students who need to respond to test questions or assignments.

According to the Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) §15-249.03(K):

“Dyslexia” means a specific learning disorder that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

Before examining the characteristics of dyslexia, it is important to understand how the used to support student needs. Focusing on a student’s individual needs is the most important thing to keep in mind. While a student may have been provided with a label, the specific needs of students with the same label can vary tremendously.

You will note that Arizona’s dyslexia definition is not included in the IDEA definition. This new definition is included in Arizona statute so that educators and parents can better understand the needs of students with dyslexia. School systems do not “diagnose”; instead, they determine whether a child is eligible for special education and related services. This process of eligibility determination is accomplished with a comprehensive evaluation.
Characteristics

It is important to note that not all individuals with dyslexia will have all the symptoms and characteristics listed below. Other conditions may also co-exist, but are not considered defining features of dyslexia. As mentioned above, individuals may have difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and poor spelling and decoding abilities. One way to understand dyslexia is to look at non-examples, characteristics that are not indicative of dyslexia. One must also recognize that clinical features of dyslexia can overlap with other disorders, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and speech language impairment (SLI). Dyslexia is a distinct disorder that has specific characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Dyslexia Is NOT</th>
<th>What Dyslexia Is: Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A pervasive oral language impairment</td>
<td>• Difficulty learning to rhyme words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A primary problem in attention or behavior</td>
<td>• Difficulty learning the letter names and letter sounds of the alphabet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A primary problem in reading comprehension or written expression</td>
<td>• Confusion of letters and words with similar visual appearance (e.g., b and d and was and saw)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low motivation or limited effort</td>
<td>• Confusion of letters with similar sounds (/f/ and /v/)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poor vision or hearing</td>
<td>• Reversals and transpositions of letters and words that persist past the age of 7 (e.g., p and q, and on and no).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Primary emotional or behavior problems</td>
<td>• Trouble arranging letters in the correct order when spelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Autism</td>
<td>• Difficulty retaining the visual representation of irregular words for reading and spelling (e.g., once)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Childhood schizophrenia</td>
<td>• Spelling the same word in different ways on the same page (e.g., wuns, wunce, for once)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Limited intelligence</td>
<td>• Spelling words the way they sound rather than the way they look (e.g., sed for said)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Related to ethnic background or family income</td>
<td>• Difficulty pronouncing some multisyllabic words correctly (multiblication)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The result of poor teaching or limited educational opportunity</td>
<td>• Slow word perception that affects reading rate and fluency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: When a letter is enclosed between forward slashes // it refers to the letter sound, not the letter name.

Some of these characteristics are often present in young children (e.g., trouble rhyming words); whereas others are more apparent in secondary students and adults (e.g., a slow reading rate or poor spelling). The earliest warning signs of dyslexia are sometimes noted in a child’s spoken language; for other students, oral language development is perfectly normal. As a child ages, warning signs may be noted in the child’s slowness in reading and spelling development. In addition, students with deficient word reading skills often avoid reading, and as a result, spend less time practicing reading (Tummer & Greaney, 2010).
Prevalence and Characteristics of Students with SLD

- SLD is the largest category of students receiving special education services.

- There are 2.4 million American public school students (approximately five percent of the total public school enrollment) identified with learning disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

- Forty-two percent of the 5.7 million school-age children with all kinds of disabilities who receive special education services are served in this category.

- The number of students identified with SLD has declined by 18 percent between 2002 and 2011, while total special education has declined by just three percent.

- Two-thirds of students identified with SLD are male.

- Black and Hispanic students are overrepresented in many states while white and Asian students are underrepresented in this category.

How Prevalent Is Dyslexia?

About 13–14% of the school population nationwide has a condition that qualifies them for special education. Current studies indicate that one-half of all the students who qualify for special education are classified as having a learning disability (LD) (6–7%). About 85% of those LD students have a primary learning disability in reading and language processing. Nevertheless, many more people—perhaps as many as 15–20% of the population as a whole—have some of the symptoms of dyslexia, including slow or inaccurate reading, poor spelling, poor writing, or mixing up similar words. Not all of these will qualify for special education, but they are likely to struggle with many aspects of academic learning and are likely to benefit from systematic, explicit, instruction in reading, writing, and language.

Dyslexia occurs in people of all backgrounds and intellectual levels. People who are very bright can also be dyslexic. They are often capable or even gifted in areas that do not require strong language skills, such as art, computer science, design, drama, electronics, math, mechanics, music, physics, sales, and sports.

In addition, dyslexia runs in families: dyslexic parents are very likely to have children who are dyslexic. Some people are identified as dyslexic early in their lives, but for others, their dyslexia goes unidentified until they get older.
AZ Find: http://www.azed.gov/special-education/az-find/

Early Identification and Evaluation

Child find is a component of IDEA that requires public education agencies (PEAs) to locate, identify, and evaluate all children with disabilities aged birth through 21 located within their geographic boundaries that are in need of early intervention or special education services. In Arizona, this process is called AZ Find.

Child find applies to children who are:
- Suspected of having a disability even though they are advancing from grade to grade
- Highly mobile, such as migrant and homeless children
- Wards of the state
- Private school students
- Homeschooled students

Note: Because charter schools have no geographic boundaries, their responsibility is to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities within the population they serve who are in need of special education and related services.

Early Identification:
School pre-referral teams go by different names in different places. In some schools, the teams are called the Student Study Team (SST) or the Student Intervention Team, while in others, the teams are called the Child Study Team, Teacher Support Team, or Student Success Team. Regardless of the name used, the purpose of the pre-referral team is to:
- work together in problem solving to identify the child’s learning strengths and needs,
- put strategies into action, and
- evaluate their impact so the child can succeed in the general education classroom.

There are no rules for membership on a pre-referral team. Generally, the team includes general education teachers who are most familiar with the general education classroom and curriculum and a counselor or administrator. The team may also include a school psychologist, special education teachers, and related service personnel, such as speech and language pathologists. Each school selects team members depending on what works best.

If you as a parent suspect that your child has characteristics of dyslexia, or if you suspect your child may have a learning disability, contact your school’s administration and let them know this as soon as you have a suspicion.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports/Response to Intervention (MTSS/RTI) and the Evaluation Process

MTSS: http://www.azed.gov/mtss/
Over the years, the term *response to intervention* (RTI) has been used to discuss frameworks for instructional support for all students. In the state of Arizona, the term *multi-tiered system of supports* (MTSS) is now being used instead. MTSS is a coherent continuum of systemwide, data-based problem-solving practices supporting a rapid response to the academic and behavioral needs of all students. This comprehensive system of supports includes assessments (universal screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, formative, and summative), research-based instruction, and interventions. This instruction/intervention is delivered across multiple tiers dependent on the individual student needs identified by student outcome data.

**Tier 3: (Intensive) Intensive, Individualized Interventions & Supports**
The most intense (increased time, narrowed focus, reduced group size) instruction/intervention based on individual student need provided in addition to and aligned with tiers 1 and 2 academic and behavior instruction and supports.

**Tier 2: (Targeted) Targeted, Supplemental Interventions & Supports**
Individual or small group targeted instruction/intervention and supplemental supports in addition to and aligned with tier 1 academic and behavior instruction and supports.

**Tier 1: (Universal) Core, Universal Instruction & Supports**
Academic and behavior instruction and supports designed and differentiated for all students in all settings.

**MTSS/RTI and the IDEA**
In the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, new requirements regarding the identification of children with specific learning disabilities came into effect. These regulations allowed for the use of MTSS, or a child’s response to scientific, research-based intervention to determine eligibility.

*It is important to keep in mind that an MTSS/RTI process does not replace the need for a comprehensive evaluation, and the results of an MTSS/RTI process may be one component of the information reviewed in an evaluation. A comprehensive evaluation requires the use of a variety of data-gathering tools and strategies even if an MTSS process was used.*

**Public Education Agency (PEA) Procedures Using the MTSS Process**

If you are a parent concerned about your child’s reading ability, your local school may use the MTSS process to help determine if your child is eligible for special education services. This process may be tied to the Student Study Team (SST) process. However, the SST process by itself is not a comprehensive educational evaluation.
The MTSS process may not be used to delay a parent’s request for evaluation of a child for eligibility for special education.

**Learning disabilities are not a prescription for failure. With the right kinds of instruction, guidance and support, there are no limits to what individuals with LD can achieve.**

Sheldon H. Horowitz, EdD, Director, Learning Resources & Research
National Center for Learning Disabilities

**Evaluation Process:**
The multifaceted evaluation process for determining whether a child meets the eligibility criteria for special education and related services encompasses a variety of activities. The culmination of the evaluation process, including observations, interviews, screening, and formal assessment by a professionally trained school psychologist in administering and interpreting psychometric results provides the multidisciplinary team with information to determine whether or not specific criteria are met for eligibility.

**Disability Classifications Relevant to Specific Learning Disability—Dyslexia**

**Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) §15-761:**
“Developmental delay” means performance by a child who is at least three years of age but less than ten years of age on a norm-referenced test that measures at least one and one half, but not more than three, standard deviations below the mean for children of the same chronological age in two or more of the following areas:

(a) Cognitive development.
(b) Physical development.
(c) Communication development.
(d) Social or emotional development.
(e) Adaptive development.

The results of the norm-referenced measure must be corroborated by information from a comprehensive developmental assessment and from parental input, if available, as measured by a judgment-based assessment or survey. If there is a discrepancy between the measures,
the evaluation team shall determine eligibility based on a preponderance of the information presented.

**Classroom Indications:**
Students’ ability to acquire, use, and retrieve information may be impaired/delayed. Their ability to move and interact with their environment with appropriate coordination, balance, and strength or fine motor skills may not be age appropriate. Expressing and developing a sense of oneself or being able to care for one’s own personal needs (e.g., eating, toileting, and dressing) may be impaired and not appropriate for same-age peers. The IEP team will need to carefully consider the students’ needs in all areas of delay as identified by assessment results.

“Specific learning disability (SLD)” means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or perform mathematical calculations. The term “specific learning disability” includes conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. That term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disabilities, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

**Classroom Indications:**
Each person with SLD has a different combination or cluster of characteristics which can range from mild to severe. Effective intervention strategies should include a total approach to meeting the educational, psychological, medical, and social needs of the student. Accommodations in the classroom may include extended time, use of a calculator, a reader or person to record answers, or use of an audio recording device for students who need to respond to test questions or assignments.

**School-Age Psychoeducational Evaluation: Specific Learning Disability—Dyslexia**

The profile of strengths and weaknesses of an individual with dyslexia varies with age, educational opportunity, and the influence of co-occurring factors such as emotional adjustment, ability to pay attention in learning situations, difficulties with health, or motivation. Nevertheless, clusters of distinguishing characteristics are frequently noted. When a specific learning disability—dyslexia is suspected, the multidisciplinary team should consider the following areas:

**Background Information:**
Current information from parents and teachers provides a snapshot of the student’s overall development and pattern of strengths and weaknesses. Check for delays in speech or language development that can put a child at risk for reading difficulties. Discuss the response to any interventions the student has received at school, home, or through tutoring. School attendance patterns should be reviewed. A pattern of poor attendance or multiple school enrollments can sometimes explain an identified weakness in skill development.
Oral Language Skills:
Our ability to listen to and understand speech and express our thoughts through speech are competencies referred to as oral language skills. Oral language is made up of low-level skills, such as recognizing and making the sounds that are essential for our speech, and higher-level skills, such as getting meaning by listening to someone speak or creating sentences to express thoughts.

Students with dyslexia typically have adequate higher-level language skills. Indicators include being able to understand an age-appropriate story and spoken directions, to carry on a conversation, and to understand and use words that are age appropriate. While students with dyslexia may have strong higher-level language skills, they typically have a weakness in low-level language skills. This limits the ability to learn to read and spell using the sounds of the language. Young children with dyslexia often have delays in language development, but their higher-level language skills are usually age-appropriate by the time they enter school. Difficulties with higher-level language skills may suggest a need for a language evaluation by a speech-language pathologist to rule out language impairment.

Word Recognition:
The ability to read single printed words may be referred to as word recognition, word reading, or word identification. A student who is not able to use contextual cues to help figure out a word is low in word recognition skills. Tests of word recognition that score both accuracy and the time it takes for the student to read the words (fluency) are particularly useful. Students with dyslexia often become accurate but are still very slow when reading words. Both accuracy and the speed of word reading can affect comprehension of what is read.

Decoding:
Decoding is the ability to use letter-sound knowledge, spelling patterns, and chunking the word into smaller parts to read unfamiliar words. Decoding is also referred to as “word attack.” Decoding tests often use nonsense words that look like real words but have no meaning to get the student to rely on decoding skills rather than on memory for a word already learned.

Spelling:
Tests of spelling measure a student’s ability to spell individual words from memory. These tests tap into a student’s knowledge of letter-sound pairings, patterns of letters that cluster together to spell one sound, and the way plurals may be spelled, for example. Although spelling is the opposite of word attack, it is an even more difficult skill. It requires separating out the individual sounds in a spoken word, remembering the different ways each sound might be spelled, choosing one way, writing the letter(s) for that sound and doing the same, again, for the next sound in the word. Spelling stresses a child’s short- and long-term memory and is complicated by the ease or difficulty the child has in writing the letters legibly and in the proper order. Spelling is a common weakness among students with dyslexia and is difficult to remedy.

Phonological Processing:
Phonological processing is one small part of overall language ability. It is a low-level language skill since it does not involve meaning. Phonology is the “sound system” of our language. Our spoken language is made up of words, word parts (such as syllables), and individual sounds
(phonemes). Speakers and readers must be able to think about, remember, and correctly sequence the sounds in words in order to link letters to sounds for reading and spelling. Strong readers do this automatically without conscious effort. Usually, students with dyslexia have difficulty with identifying, pronouncing, or recalling sounds. Tests of phonological processing focus on these skills.

**Automaticity/Fluency Skills:**
Students with dyslexia typically are slow in processing visual or auditory information. Tests measuring Rapid Automatic Naming Speed often use sets of objects, colors, letters, and numbers. Letter naming speed is one of the best early predictors of reading difficulties and is often used as part of screening measures for young children. Slow naming speed results can indicate problems with developing reading fluency. Students may have a weakness in both naming speed and phonological processing.

**Reading Comprehension:**
Students with dyslexia frequently score lower on tests of reading comprehension than on listening comprehension because they have difficulty with decoding and accurately or fluently reading words. The evaluation team must be aware that students with dyslexia often have strong higher-level oral language skills and are able to get the main idea of a passage despite difficulty with the words. Further, reading comprehension tasks usually require students to read only a short passage to which they may refer when finding the answers to questions. This is why students with dyslexia may earn average scores on reading comprehension tests but still have difficulty reading and understanding long reading assignments in their grade-level textbooks.

**Vocabulary Knowledge:**
It is critical to test vocabulary knowledge since it greatly affects understanding when a student is listening or reading. Difficulties students with dyslexia might have had in learning language or with memory can affect the ability to learn the meanings of words (vocabulary). Independent reading is an important means for developing new vocabulary. Poor readers, who usually read less, are likely to have delays in vocabulary development. It is important to note, however, that students with dyslexia may perform poorly on vocabulary tests because of their decoding problems and not because they don’t know the meaning of words. Administering measurements for both reading and listening vocabulary provides a better measure of vocabulary knowledge.

The purpose of the individual assessment is to provide insight about a student, which allows the multidisciplinary team the ability to align student-specific information with instruction. If a student’s proficiency level is determined to meet the criteria for SLD, the assessment can provide present levels of performance and assist in IEP goal development.

**Section 2:**
**Essential Components of Reading Instruction**
**Kindergarten through Third Grades**

Section two of the handbook is provided to communicate to families and teachers the essential components of reading instruction that support all learners and to foster communication about how a child learns to read. This section outlines the components needed to support a strong core
of instruction in the general education classroom (MTSS, Tier 1), including how the Arizona English Language Arts (ELA) Standards support the learning of all students and comprise specific strategies and techniques for students with specific learning disabilities—dyslexia. Students with specific learning disabilities—dyslexia should first and foremost be given access to the general education curriculum.

It is imperative for all concerned to have deep understanding of reading and learning research and the best practices of instruction to support the needs of all learners. When families, general educators, and special education teachers have an understanding of what goes into strong core (Tier 1) instruction, along with the expectations of the ELA Standards, they can collaborate more effectively on the needs of students with specific learning disabilities—dyslexia when creating and implementing their IEPs.

The Arizona English Language Arts (ELA) Standards are rigorous grade-level expectations that identify the knowledge and skills students need to be successful in college or careers. All students, regardless of whether they have been identified with a disability, must be challenged to excel within the general curriculum and be prepared for a successful future, including college and/or career. Arizona Revised Statutes, at section 15-763 - Plan for providing special education definition, explains:

“Each child shall be ensured access to the general curriculum and an opportunity to meet the state’s academic standards.”

**Core Principles: Tier 1 Reading Instruction for All Students**

1. Teach phonemic awareness skills explicitly and systematically. This instruction should begin in kindergarten for all students and must be taught to students of any age who have not learned to manipulate sounds within words.

2. Teach the code of written English (phonics) in a systematic and explicit manner. For all students, teaching letter-sound correspondences in a planned sequence is most effective. Systematic phonics instruction is best taught early (in kindergarten and first grade) rather than after children have begun reading independently.

**Hallmarks of Systematic Phonics Programs**

- Instruction should be explicit and direct. All information to be learned should be taught directly with no assumptions that inferential learning will occur.
- Within the context of direct and systematic instruction, guided discovery can be effective. By questioning, the teacher leads the student to discover concepts or information at the appropriate point in the sequence of instruction.
- Multisensory instruction refers to activities in which two or more sensory modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile) are utilized to reinforce learning. Although this type of instruction is difficult to research, theories of learning and memory suggest that multisensory instruction may activate neural
connections in learners’ brains.

- After providing initial direct instruction, the teacher actively guides and supervises students as they practice the skill. An important component of guided practice involves ensuring that students practice making the correct responses rather than practicing errors. Beginning guided practice sessions with a review of the skills and careful teacher monitoring during practice are important in this regard. Practice should be done first with single patterns or concepts (e.g., reading and spelling words with only the closed syllable pattern) and then with a mixture of patterns or concepts (e.g., reading and spelling words with the closed syllable and silent-e patterns).

- Teaching for mastery and automaticity. Each skill or concept should be practiced until the student can use the skill independently. Many skills, such as the ability to recognize common spelling patterns, should be taught to a level of automaticity. That is, the student can instantly recognize these patterns without conscious attention to the process.

3. Guided, oral repeated reading is important for developing reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Students should read aloud with adults who monitor and provide corrective feedback.

4. Vocabulary knowledge should be taught directly and indirectly using a variety of methods. Teaching word meanings has a significant impact on comprehension.

5. A variety of text comprehension strategies should be taught explicitly. Teachers should teach and model strategies until students can use them independently.

Arizona Department of Education, Teaching Reading Effectively Training

Supporting Students with a Specific Learning Disability and Dyslexia in Accessing the General Education Curriculum

Students with specific learning disabilities and dyslexia are a heterogeneous group with one common characteristic: the presence of disabling conditions that significantly hinders their ability to access the general education curriculum. Therefore, how the standards are taught and assessed is important in reaching this diverse group of students. Their instruction should incorporate modifications and accommodations, including:

- Supports and related services designed to meet the unique needs of these students and to enable their access to the general education curriculum with differentiated instruction.

- An IEP which includes annual goals aligned to the curriculum to facilitate achievement of grade-level academic goals.

- Teachers and specialized instructional support personnel who are prepared and qualified to deliver high-quality, evidence-based, individualized instruction and support services.
For students with specific learning disability and dyslexia to be successful in the general curriculum, they may need additional supports and services, such as:

- Instruction should be based on detailed and frequent assessment. Individual student’s specific strengths and weaknesses in phonological awareness, decoding, encoding, fluency, and comprehension must be evaluated and used to guide diagnostic teaching.

- Information should be presented in multiple ways and allow for diverse avenues of action and expression (multisensory learning) to facilitate effective student engagement.

- Instruction should be systematic and cumulative. Material should be taught in an organized sequence beginning with the simplest and proceeding to the most complex. One finding of the National Reading Panel was that students with reading disabilities responded best to systematic phonics programs.

- Changing materials, instruction, or procedures; extending time, providing frequent practice and repetition; and using flexible groups are supports that should be considered for some students.

- Devices (assistive technology) and services should be provided to ensure a student’s access to the general education curriculum and ELA Standards.

Students with specific learning disabilities and dyslexia who continue to struggle in accessing the general curriculum would benefit from additional supplemental interventions (tier 2 or tier 3 in an MTSS model) in addition to any specially designed instruction the student is receiving as part of an IEP. As such, these interventions would not be included on the student’s IEP. Supplemental intervention would not be considered a substitute for special education services. However, any supplemental intervention delivered to an eligible student with disabilities must be consistent with the student’s IEP. Tier 2 and tier 3 interventions are described on page 13 of this document.

It is important to remember that the more time spent in tiers 2 and 3, the less exposure the student has to the general education curriculum and the more potential the child has to slip further and further behind as time goes on. Thus, a sense of urgency is implicit and is addressed with the use of data (screeners, diagnostic assessments, progress monitoring, summative assessments) to inform intervention and the need for tier 2 or tier 3 support.
Section 3: Resources

Accommodations / Modifications

Some students with specific learning disabilities and dyslexia may need accommodations or modifications in order to have equal access to and participate in the general curriculum with success. It is important to realize that accommodations are not just for students with disabilities, but for all students to access curriculum so that they are successful in school. Educators have a duty to use data and best practices to determine the needs of all students. Accommodations are a way for teachers to incorporate instructional strategies so that students have equal access to learning.

New Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines for 2016 for school and work have been released and some are posted on this website: http://www.dyslexicadvantage.org/dyslexia-and-accommodations-new-ada-guidelines-2016-for-school-and-work/.

Accommodations (for all students):
Changes made in materials, actions, or instructional strategies that enable a student with disabilities to participate more meaningfully in grade-level or course-level classroom instruction are considered accommodations. Accommodations occur in instructional activities when educators incorporate individualized strategies to meet the learning needs of a student. http://www.raisingspecialkids.org/_media/uploaded/i/0e1834167_ieppossibleclassroomaccommodationsforspecificdifficulties.pdf

Modifications:
A modification is an adjustment to an assignment or a test that changes the standard or what the test or assignment is supposed to measure. Examples of possible modifications include a student’s completing work on part of a standard or a student’s completing an alternate assignment that is more easily achievable than the standard assignment.

Needed modifications and accommodations should be written into a student’s IEP or Section 504 plan. These should be chosen to fit the student’s individual needs based on the student’s area(s) of deficit. It’s important to include the student, if appropriate, especially when the student is older and understands what he or she is capable of and requires when discussing needed accommodations and modifications. Asking the student what would be helpful is a good first step.

Here are some ideas for changes in textbooks and curriculum, the classroom environment, instruction and assignments, and possible behavior expectations that may be helpful when educating students with specific learning disabilities–dyslexia. When reviewing these ideas, keep in mind that any accommodations or modifications an IEP team chooses must be based on the individual needs of the student, and the child’s accommodations and modifications must be provided, if they are included in the child’s IEP. The list that follows is not an exhaustive list.
Books:
- Provide alternative books with similar concepts, but written at an easier reading level.
- Provide audiotapes of textbooks and have the student follow the text while listening.
- Provide summaries of chapters.
- Provide interesting reading material at or slightly above the student’s comfortable reading level.
- Use peer readers.
- Use markers to highlight important textbook sections.
- Use word-for-word sentence fill-ins.
- Provide two sets of textbooks, one for home and one for school.
- Use index cards to record major themes.
- Provide the student with a list of discussion questions before reading the material.
- Give page numbers to help the student find answers.
- Provide books and other written materials in alternative formats such as large print.

Curriculum:
- Shorten assignments to focus on mastery of key concepts.
- Shorten spelling tests to focus on mastering the most functional words.
- Substitute alternatives for written assignments (clay models, posters, panoramas, collections, etc.).
- Specify and list exactly what the student will need to learn to pass. Review this frequently.
- Modify expectations based on student needs (e.g., “When you have read this chapter, you should be able to list three reasons for the Civil War.”).
- Give alternatives to long written reports (e.g., write several short reports, preview new audiovisual materials and write a short review, give an oral report on an assigned topic).

Classroom Environment:
- Develop individualized rules for the student.
- Evaluate the classroom structure against the student’s needs (flexible structure, firm limits, etc.).
- Keep workspaces clear of unrelated materials.
- Keep the classroom quiet during intense learning times.
- Reduce visual distractions in the classroom (mobiles, etc.).
- Provide a computer for written work.
- Seat the student close to the teacher or a positive role model.
- Use a study carrel. (Provide extras so that the student is not singled out.)
- Seat the student away from windows or doorways.
- Provide an unobstructed view of the chalkboard, teacher, movie screen, etc.
- Keep extra supplies of classroom materials (pencils, books) on hand.
- Use alternatives to crossword puzzles or word finds.
- Maintain adequate space between desks.

Instruction and Assignment Directions:
- Use both oral and printed directions.
- Give directions in small steps and in as few words as possible.
- Number and sequence the steps in a task.
- Have student repeat the directions for a task.
- Provide visual aids.
- Show a model of the end product of directions (e.g., a completed math problem or finished quiz).
- Stand near the student when giving directions or presenting a lesson.
Time/Transitions:
• Alert student several minutes before a transition from one activity to another is planned; give several reminders.
• Provide additional time to complete a task.
• Allow extra time to turn in homework without penalty.
• Provide assistance when moving about the building.

Tests:
• Go over directions orally.
• Teach the student how to take tests (e.g., how to review, to plan time for each section).
• Provide a vocabulary list with definitions.
• Permit as much time as needed to finish tests.
• Allow tests to be taken in a room with few distractions (e.g., the library).
• Have test materials read to the student, and allow oral responses.
• Divide tests into small sections of similar questions or problems.
• Use recognition tests (true-false, multiple choice, or matching) instead of essays.
• Allow the student to complete an independent project as an alternative test.
• Give progress reports instead of grades.
• Grade spelling separately from content.
• Provide typed test materials, not tests written in cursive.

• Allow take-home or open-book tests.
• Provide possible answers for fill-in-the blank sections.
• Provide the first letter of the missing word.
• Use Post-it notes to mark assignments in textbooks.
• Check progress and provide feedback often in the first few minutes of each assignment.
• Place a ruler under sentences being read for better tracking.
• Introduce an overview of long-term assignments so the student knows what is expected and when it is due.
• Break long-term assignments into small, sequential steps, with daily monitoring and frequent grading.
• Have the student practice presenting in a small group before presenting to the class.
• Hand out worksheets one at a time.
• Sequence work, with the easiest part first.
• Use blackline copies, not dittos.
• Provide study guides and study questions that directly relate to tests.
• Reinforce student for recording assignments and due dates in a notebook.
• Draw arrows on worksheets, chalkboard, or overheads to show how ideas are related, or use other graphic organizers such as a flow chart.

Other:

Testing Accommodations on the AzMERIT:
Assistive Technology for Students with Dyslexia and Other Print Disabilities

IEP teams are required, under IDEA, to consider whether a student with a disability requires assistive technology in order to receive a free and appropriate public education, regardless of the type or severity of the student’s disability.

When a student cannot read a textbook because he or she is blind or has low vision, IEP teams are quick to recognize the need for assistive technology. When a student cannot read a textbook because an orthopedic impairment prevents him or her from physically holding a book or turning the pages, IEP teams are quick to recognize the need for assistive technology. When a student cannot read a textbook because of a specific learning disability with dyslexia, it may not be as readily apparent to IEP teams that these students too can benefit from assistive technology.

What Is Assistive Technology (AT)?

Although people typically think of AT as being devices and equipment only, IDEA actually defines school-based assistive technology in terms of both devices and services.

IDEA defines an assistive technology device as:

Any item, piece of equipment or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of children with disabilities. (The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device.)

Broadly speaking, AT devices can be almost anything a school makes, buys, or customizes that helps a student with a disability learn, communicate, or function better in the classroom. AT devices may involve a low-tech system constructed from items purchased at a local hardware store or a high-tech customized computer and software system costing thousands of dollars.

IDEA defines an assistive technology service as:

Any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, and use of an assistive technology device.

Broadly speaking, AT services are any services required to help a student get and learn to use the assistive technology devices needed. AT services may include training for not only the student but also for general educators, special educators, other staff members, and parents.

What Kind of AT Might Students with Dyslexia Need?

IEP teams should consider the student (S), the environment (E), and the task (T) in order to determine which AT tools (T) should be tried. This process is known as the SETT model. There are other frameworks for considering AT, but the SETT model is the most widely used in school settings. Free online resources for schools and parents interested in learning more about the SETT model and reading include the following linked resources:

- ATTO’s Free SETT Model Internet Module
- Assistive Technology Internet Modules
Some students with dyslexia may find it easier to read when the spacing between lines, between words, or even between the characters within words is increased. There are some easy, free ways to change these parameters, including the following:

- Use the formatting features to change spacing in Word and Google docs.
- Use Chrome extensions such as Readability and AT Bar to change spacing on webpages.
- Use Settings when reading on mobile devices such as smart phones or tablets to change spacing.

The majority of students in grades 4–12 who are identified as having specific learning disabilities in reading, including dyslexia, do not have difficulties reading the text. They have difficulties understanding what they have read. This component of reading is called “reading comprehension.”

For students who struggle with reading decoding, assistive technology can help them bypass this barrier by allowing them to listen to text instead of (or in addition to) reading it. This type of assistive technology includes these resources:

- **Audio Books** – recorded books that are narrated by human readers. Audio books do not display text. Sources for audio books include Learning Ally (eligibility requirements), Audible.com (no eligibility requirements), amazon.com (no eligibility requirements), freedclassicaudiobooks.com (no eligibility requirements) and your local public library (no eligibility requirements).

- **Text-Synched Audio Books** – audiobooks that are read aloud by the computer’s voice while the words that are being spoken are highlighted. This is sometimes referred to as “multi-sensory reading.” Tools that allow for this feature include these:
  - Bookshare
  - Voice Dream Reader iOS app

- **E-books** are electronic versions of printed books displayed on a computer or handheld device designed specifically for this purpose. Some, but not all, e-books may be read aloud by a computerized (synthesized) voice.

- Freeware that will read text from Word docs and PDFs aloud, such as Balabolka.

- iOS and Android OCR and text-to-speech apps that will read text aloud, such as Prizmo, TextGrabber, Voice Dream Reader

Students are also often expected to read information from the Internet independently. There are a number of assistive technology tools that will read text from webpages aloud. These include:

- Chrome extensions such as SpeakIt
- Snap&Read Universal Chrome extension
- Read & Write Gold Chrome extension
It’s important to note that not all students with dyslexia will benefit from listening to grade-level text. Processing issues and vocabulary deficits make it difficult for some students to understand grade-level text, even when they are listening to it. Assessments such as the Protocol for Accommodations in Reading can help IEP teams make data-based reading accommodation recommendations for students.

Students with dyslexia may also have deficits in vocabulary. Assistive technology tools that either decrease the complexity of the text or define words in accessible ways include:

- Snap&Read Universal software and app with text leveling
- Rewordify.com website
- Text Compactor website
- NewsELA website
- Dictionary.com website with synonym complexity slider
- Crack the Books digital textbooks that present science content at five reading levels
- Simple Wikipedia

How Can Schools and Parents Get AT to Try?

All district, charter, and approved private day schools may use the Arizona Department of Education’s Assistive Technology Lending Library, free of charge. The Lending Library will ship AT tools and resources, at no charge, to schools to try for free for one month. You can search the inventory to find AT tools in the library that may support students with dyslexia; these include iPads with specific apps, laptops with specific software, note-taking apps, smart pens, and much more.

Parents can use Arizona Technology Access Program’s federally funded, free AT Demonstration and Loan Program. Parents can borrow AT devices for up to two weeks or arrange for a face-to-face consultation or demonstration of an AT item at the program’s office, located in central Phoenix. To arrange a consultation or demonstration, contact AzTAP at (602) 728-9534, or send an email to askAzTAP@nau.edu.

It can be very helpful for schools to check out an item from ADE’s lending library at the same time that parents check out the identical item from AzTAP. This allows the IEP team to collect and analyze data from classroom work and homework using the AT being trialed.

AT tools included in this document do not represent an exhaustive list. The Arizona Department of Education neither recommends nor endorses any device or system. Each IEP team must make individualized data-driven recommendations for their students’ accommodations for reading.

Arizona Department of Education AT Resources


- Az-Tech’s AT Consideration Guide (Includes a list of potential assistive technology tools and strategies specific to reading, writing, and spelling). Available at
External AT for Reading Resources


Access to Accessible Educational Materials for Students with Disabilities

Public education agencies (PEAs) are required by state and federal law to provide accessible educational materials to students with print disabilities “in a timely manner.” Accessible educational materials (AEM) are textbooks and related core instructional materials that have been converted into specialized formats (e.g., Braille, audio, digital text, or large print) for students who have print disabilities, such as blindness or low vision, physical disabilities that prevent the student from manipulating printed materials, or language-based reading disabilities, such as dyslexia.

Arizona Department of Education Online Resources for Accessible Educational Materials


External Online Resources for Accessible Educational Materials

- National Center on Accessible Educational Materials: http://aem.cast.org/

- AEM Navigator: http://aem.cast.org/navigating/aem-navigator.html#V8hvVvkrLhc

References & Web Links


- Mather, N. & Wendling B. J. (2012). The Essentials of Dyslexia Assessment and Intervention


- Possible Classroom Accommodations for Specific Disabilities: Adapted from: How to Get the Best Education for Your Chronically or Seriously III Child. Phoenix Children’s Hospital. Available at http://www.raisingspecialkids.org/_media/uploaded/i/0e1834167_ieppossibleclassroomaccommodationsforspecificdifficulties.pdf.

- Raising Special Kids. Available at http://www.raisingspecialkids.org/.

• Reading Rockets. Available at www.readingrockets.org.


• Teaching Reading Effectively Training, Arizona Department of Education


• Understood for Learning and Attention Issues. Available at http://www.understood.org.


• Universal Design for Learning. Available at http://www.udlcenter.org/.

• University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning. Big Ideas in Beginning Reading. Available at http://reading.uoregon.edu/.

Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services

• http://www.azed.gov/special-education/

Arizona Department of Education

Websites:

• Arizona College and Career Ready Standards ELA. http://www.azed.gov/standards-practices/englishlanguageartsstandards/

• Early Childhood.  

• Early Literacy to Support Move On When Reading (MOWR).  

Webinar:

• To view the Developing a Thriving Reader Webinar, copy and paste this link into your browser: https://cms.azed.gov/home/GetDocumentFile?id=553835aaaadebe0c6033e78a.

Read On Arizona Resources:


National Institute for Literacy Resources


• Move On When Reading. http://www.azed.gov/mowr/

• The Kindergarten Experience; Kindergarten Development Inventory (KDI). http://www.azed.gov/early-childhood/the-kindergarten-developmental-inventory-kdi-the-kindergarten-experience/

Guidance Documents


Preschool Development Grant Manual


Professional Learning


• LETRS. http://www.azed.gov/special-education/pls/personnel-development/

IDEA 2004

• IDEA–Regulations; Early Intervening services. http://www.ideapartnership.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=842&osepage=1


Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.)

- A.R.S. 15-701 Common school; promotions; requirements; certificate; supervision of eighth grades by superintendent of high school district; high school admissions; academic credit; definition. http://www.azleg.gov/FormatDocument.asp?inDoc=/ars/15/00701.htm&Title=15&DocType=ARS


- Schools; Reading Assistance; Dyslexic Pupils. http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/52leg/1r/bills/sb1461p.pdf