Writing with Dyslexia

Most strategies recommended for students with dyslexia are based on general best practices for any writer.

Like other writing strategies, studies advice to start out working on short excerpts and to break ideas down into small units, before tackling larger, complex structures.

However, in order to better serve the needs of students with dyslexia, studies highlight how oral and aural elements can help improve writing and reading skills.

For example, many strategies involve either reading your own text aloud or having others read it aloud, and providing oral rather than written feedback.

In addition, you may privilege clarity in the connections between ideas over meticulously correct spelling and grammar in the initial stages of the writing process.

WRITING STRATEGIES:

1. **PRE-WRITING EXERCISES:**
   - Outlines: use key-words rather than full sentences.
   - **Tell someone** else about the topic. They can write down the structure, read it to you, and give feedback (alternatively, you can record yourself).
   - Work with short prompts. Break down complicated ideas into sets of smaller questions.
   - Use models of argumentative writing or a checklist of questions. For example:
     - What is your claim?
     - What are the grounds or data (scientific or documentary) for your claim?
     - How are the grounds or data linked to the claim?
     - Is there additional support or backing for the claim and data?
     - Does the claim need to be qualified?
     - Are there counter-arguments or rebuttals that need to be addressed?

2. **COMPOSING A DRAFT:**
   - When getting stuck writing, record yourself explaining ideas.
   - **Start in the middle,** with the story-telling material/details of an argument (introductions and conclusions are easier to write at the end).
2 stepwise methods:

**OSWALD** (James Madison University’s Special Education Program):
- Outline major points
- Say the outline out loud, think about the connections between the points and which are the most important
- Write paragraphs about the most important ideas first
- Add connections between the paragraphs
- Look at the connections by re-reading your paper
- Draft a conclusion reframing the initial important points

**WRITE** (2007 study by Harris, Graham, Mason, Friedlander & Reid):
- Work from a plan to develop thesis statement, start with an attention getter
- Remember your goals (vocabulary, organization, varied sentence types, maintain topic control)
- Include a transition word for every paragraph
- Try to use different words and kinds of sentences
- Exciting, interesting words to draw attention to the main idea or materials

3. **REVISING AND EDITING:**

- Use a **Revision checklist**. Go from the larger towards more detailed concerns. Consider addressing some of the following items, utilizing the technologies below for additional help when appropriate.
  - What is the **principal thesis/idea** of the paper?
    - Is it clearly expressed in the introduction and conclusion?
  - What is the **governing idea of every paragraph**?
    - Is it this clearly explained in the paragraph’s topic sentence?
    - Is it clear how this idea relates to the principal thesis/idea of the paper?
  - Is the **idea in every sentence** clearly expressed?
  - Are the **connections between sentences** clear?
  - Are all sentences **complete, grammatically correct** constructions?
  - Is the **correct and consistent terminology** used?
  - Is a **diverse vocabulary** used?
    - Are the relationships between sentences and words clear when synonyms are used?
  - **Citations**
  - **Capitals and Italics**
  - **Punctuation & Spelling**
- Editing: **Focus on one thing** at the time (e.g. you can use different colors for different kinds of edits).
- Use peer editing or advanced spell-checking programs.
- **Have someone read** paragraphs, thesis statements, etc. aloud to you.
- **Editing checklist:** SCOPE (James Madison University’s Special Education Program):
  - Spelling
  - Capitalization
  - Order of words
  - Punctuation
  - Express complete thoughts in each sentence

**TECHNOLOGY THAT CAN HELP**

**Naturalreader:** Offers free Text-To-Speech. You can paste text or import documents into the tool, which the program will read aloud. [https://www.naturalreaders.com/index.html](https://www.naturalreaders.com/index.html)

**OnlineOCR:** Converts text in image files into digital text that can be read by a computer. [https://www.onlineocr.net/](https://www.onlineocr.net/)

**Talktyper:** Online dictation tool that types out what you are saying. [https://talktyper.com/](https://talktyper.com/)

**SELECTED READINGS ON DYSLEXIA:**


Amy Benson Brown, “Is Dislexia or ADHD Affecting Your Writing Process?” (2014) [https://www.academiccoachingandwriting.org/academic-writing/academic-writing-blog/viii-is-adhd-or-dyslexia-affecting-your-writing-process](https://www.academiccoachingandwriting.org/academic-writing/academic-writing-blog/viii-is-adhd-or-dyslexia-affecting-your-writing-process)


Joanna Nijakowska, *Dyslexia in the Foreign Language Classroom* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2010). [Yale online: http://search.library.yale.edu/catalog/11719493?counter=2](http://search.library.yale.edu/catalog/11719493?counter=2)