

Dyslexia and careers

Contents

Skills and strengths with dyslexia	2
Reasonable adjustments	4
Job search	5
Applications and CV	5
At interview	6
Assessments and tests	6

It is believed that one in ten of us is dyslexic.

Dyslexia is not a barrier to success as demonstrated by Richard Branson founder of Virgin Group, IKEA founder Ingvar Kamprad, actor and comedian Whoopi Goldberg, former CEO of Goldman Sachs Gary Cohn, John Chambers, former CEO of CISCO, actor Keira Knightley, and a whole list of Hollywood names.

Dyslexia can offer a unique perspective in navigating the competitive graduate job market. Graduate applications, CVs, cover letters, assessment days and interviews can be opportunities for growth even if reading, writing and spelling aren't your strengths.

Dyslexia does not manifest in the same way for everyone. Some individuals may struggle with spelling and grammar, others with ordering their ideas or clearly structuring sentences which can make giving examples in interviews more difficult.

You don't have to face these challenges alone; there are numerous empowering strategies and tools available to support you. Embrace resources such as mind mapping and voice-activated software, which can be your allies in achieving success.

Seek help from others with writing your CV and cover letters and when preparing for interviews.

Obtaining this support will enable you to focus on your strengths and recognise the strengths you have as a result of dyslexia.

Play to your strengths. Lots of dyslexics are creative, visual thinkers and much more besides. Focus on these traits and back them up with examples in your applications and interviews.

The information below discusses show some of these strengths and also goes through some of the considerations when engaging with the recruitment process for people with dyslexia.

Skills and strengths with dyslexia

Dyslexia presents differently for each individual. These are some of the strengths and skills that you can look for within yourself:

Seeing the bigger picture

People with dyslexia often see things more holistically, taking in stimulus and information from the wider environment/sources and synthesizing these to form an understanding. This can be useful for enabling strategic thinking, a quality that is highly sought in graduate roles.

"Perhaps my early problems with dyslexia made me more intuitive: when someone sends me a written proposal, rather than dwelling on detailed facts and figures, I find that my imagination grasps and expands on what I read." - - Richard Branson, from *Losing My Virginity: How I've Survived, Had Fun, and Made a Fortune Doing Business My Way*, Times Business, 1998

Interconnected reasoning

Interconnected reasoning is the ability to make connections or see similarities such as analogies or causal relationships as well see and understand multiple perspectives. Individuals capable of interconnected reasoning can get the "gist" or big-picture context surrounding an event or idea, enabling them to identify new and innovative connections and provide insights that others may miss.

Many people with dyslexia work in highly interdisciplinary fields or fields that require them to combine perspectives and techniques gained from different disciplines or backgrounds.

Improved pattern recognition

People with dyslexia can have the ability to see how things connect to form complex systems, and to identify similarities among multiple things. Such strengths are likely to be of particular significance for fields like science and mathematics, where visual representations are key.

Pattern narrative reasoning

Many people with dyslexia tend to remember facts as experiences, examples or stories, rather than abstractions.

These individuals excel in fields where telling and understanding stories are important, like sales, counselling, physiotherapy, trial law or even teaching. In addition, a large number of professional writers are dyslexic.

Dynamic Reasoning

Dynamic reasoning is the ability to reason or make predictions in settings where the facts are incomplete or changing. This skill is linked to interconnected reasoning and the ability to see the bigger picture. Individuals with these strengths often work in business, financial markets or scientific fields which reconstruct past events, like geologists or palaeontologists. These people are comfortable working with processes that are constantly changing, and in making predictions.

Finding the odd one out

People with dyslexia can excel at global visual processing (seeing a visual stimulus as a whole) and the detection of impossible figures (optical illusions). They can look at large quantities of visual data spot the things which are out of place.

There are so many people with dyslexia in the field of astrophysics that it prompted research at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. Findings confirmed that those with dyslexia are better at identifying and memorizing complex images.

Thinking outside the box – problem solving

Those with dyslexia are well known for having sudden leaps of insight that solve problems with an unorthodox approach. This is an intuitive approach to problem solving, easing around a problem to let connections assemble.

Good spatial knowledge

Many people with dyslexia demonstrate better skills at manipulating 3D objects in their mind, meaning individuals excel in areas such as art, sculpture. Many of the world's top architects and fashion designers have dyslexia.

Picture thinkers

People with dyslexia tend to think in pictures rather than words. Research at the University of California has demonstrated children with dyslexia have enhanced picture recognition memory.

In an increasingly visual world of infographics, memes and online advertising, this could be a strength in communicating with others.

Highly innovative/ creative

Many of the world's most creative actors have dyslexia.

Pablo Picasso (Artist)

Picasso was described by his teachers as “having difficulty differentiating the orientation of letters”. Picasso painted his subjects as he saw them – sometimes out of order, backwards or upside down. His paintings demonstrated the power of his imagination, which was perhaps linked to his inability to see written words properly. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/8128233/Dyslexia-the-secret-ofDa-Vinci-and-Picassos-success.html>

Ikea's Founder – Ingvar Kamprad – was influential in creating distinct furniture assembly instructions, which largely consist only of images. These visual instructions can be universally understood, and have contributed to the company's worldwide appeal.

Good verbal communication skills

Despite possible weaknesses with reading and writing, many individuals with dyslexia have developed great verbal communication skills.

Persistence and determination

Many individuals with dyslexia are persistent and determined. Some things might take a bit longer or are harder to work through and understand. Having got this far to university, you will have already shown these qualities.

Collaboration and teamwork

Understanding divergent ways of being, and thinking about your own experience, can also help to make you more aware of others' experiences.

By knowing your strengths, we can help you to nurture them, and enable you to develop your skills and continue learning and progressing.

Reasonable adjustments

You can choose to disclose your dyslexia and can do so during any point in the recruitment process. In the UK employers must make 'reasonable adjustments' for people with dyslexia, which means making allowances in interview and selection and providing certain kinds of support in the job.

Reasonable adjustments give you a fair chance and provide the conditions to perform well. Reasonable adjustments should be implemented throughout the recruitment process and should continue throughout an employee's time with the organisation until their departure.

Understanding the reasonable adjustments available can help you request these of potential or new employers.

Examples of reasonable adjustments include:

- Using a computer instead of handwriting, or a facility to print off documents.
- Accessing modified equipment and computer software. Software can be used to assist with proofreading and planning work, mind mapping, spell checking and screen reading. There are also speech to text and voice recognition softwares available.
- Making instructions and manuals more accessible (e.g. different colour backgrounds, larger fonts, and specific dyslexia friendly fonts, coloured transparency sheets, audio versions of text)
- Providing written materials or tests in advance of an interview and in alternative formats such as electronic or hard copies.
- Allowing extra time for reading and considering information, planning and producing written assessments.
- Allocating some areas of your work that are not integral to your role to someone else e.g. minute taking, proofreading.

- Requesting a quiet working space.

Many reasonable adjustments can be implemented without much expenditure, if there are additional costs you can apply for funding through the government's Access to Work scheme.

Job search

There are ways to help identify some employers who are particularly keen to attract applications from dyslexic candidates. Things to look out for include:

- Achievement of the Disability Confident Employer status (formerly 'Two Ticks' Award (symbolised by two ticks and the words "positive about disabled people"). Only employers who have proved ongoing commitment to disability initiatives and support of employees/applicants with disabilities are able to achieve this award. These employers also guarantee interviews will be offered to any disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for the role.
- Equal opportunities policy statement on company websites.
- Profiles of disabled employees on website or company literature.
- Evidence of commitment to equal opportunities on recruitment material (including offer of adjustment to materials at application stage and requests for information about adjustments needed to enable optimum performance during the recruitment process or in the workplace).

However just because an employer does not appear to demonstrate the criteria above it does not mean they will not be disability friendly.

Check out each job description, and see how your strengths fit in. Would you be comfortable in this position? Focus on your strengths, rather than your weaknesses.

These following links are to just some of the organisations that post roles specifically for people with disability, learning difference or long term health conditions:

- [Ambitious about autism](#)
- [Employ-Ability](#)
- [Even Break](#)
- [My Plus Students Club](#)

Applications and CV

Writing your CV and applications takes time.

Here are some of our tips:

- Allow enough time to write your CV or application. Have a break away from it before rereading it with fresh eyes. If possible download or complete on a computer and use spell check.
- For applications, use lists or mindmaps to help structure your longer answers. Write a rough draft before completing the form and try not to jump around in your answers.

- Ask someone to proofread and sense check your CV and applications.
- Check through your application forms to ensure you have completed all of the required sections.

At interview

Interviews can be a source of stress for any student, If you have dyslexia you may find interpreting compound questions or structuring coherent answers under pressure more challenging. However, there are ways to prepare that can help you to feel more confident ahead of an interview.

Some top tips:

- Consider potential interview questions and practise how you could answer these. Mock interviews can help you consolidate your answers ready for the real interview.
- Think about how you would describe the effects of your dyslexia and your coping strategies. Remember to also draw on the positives of dyslexia as well. Note that an employer is entitled to ask questions about how your dyslexia may affect the role you are being interviewed for, but they cannot ask any personal questions or questions about your dyslexia that do not strictly relate to your performance of the role.
- Ask for permission to use notes or prompt cards in the interview if you wish to.
- If you need clarity on an interview question, ask for a questions to be repeated or reframed, or that multiple stage questions are asked in steps

Assessments and tests

Some recruitment processes will involve certain selection tools to assess your ability to do the job. These may include psychometric or aptitude tests, group exercises or case studies.

Adjustments available may include extra time to complete the tests or alternative format material. In some cases, you may be exempt from some tests, such as multiple choice and psychometric tests, if you find the visual tracking and sequencing skills required difficult.

Some top tips:

- If the employer has not told you in advance what the process will include contact them and ask to ensure you can prepare.
- Check if you can use assistive software such as screen readers and/or voice recognition on your laptop or using the organisation's computers.
- If case studies are involved ask if you can receive these beforehand to give you enough time to read and process the information.
- If you receive extra time in your university test you may also get this in assessments with employers.
- Request papers on different coloured paper.
- Come prepared with different coloured highlighters if appropriate.