



SNEAKY WAYS TO HELP WITH THE DYSLEXIA-RELATED LONG WORD CHALLENGES

It's not your imagination - it's much harder for most children and adults with dyslexia to learn long words - and it has nothing to do with intelligence.

The sneaky reason is that for most dyslexic people, learning a random sequence of sounds puts more demands on those phonological processing pathways in the brain that once made it hard to learn to read.

It's good to be aware of this difficulty and also know that it has no relationship to things like creative insight or problem solving ability, which might be sky high. It does mean that for certain subjects - like science vocabulary, geography place names, long people and place names in literature, and foreign languages, extra care and time may be necessary to master 'long words.'

A [recent paper](#) from researchers at the University of Arizona and University of Missouri, added some additional information about what was harder and what was easier to learn for young dyslexic students.

A few take-home points:

PAIRED ASSOCIATE LEARNING IS STRONG IN DYSLEXIC LEARNERS

"The children with dyslexia were as accurate as peers...across all four sets of games and their manipulations. Thus, there does not seem to be a fundamental deficit in paired-associated learning."

What this means: Don't use auditory-only or print-only ways teaching vocabulary.

Instead, **PAIR WORD LEARNING WITH PICTURES.**

Word Learning can be much more difficult if words are taught through a single route. Even the long words used in this study were mastered by dyslexic students if they were paired with animated characters.

DYSLEXIC STUDENTS HAD MORE DIFFICULTY WITH LONG WORDS AND PHONETICALLY-CHALLENGING WORDS

Dyslexic students were “less accurate than peers with typical reading for three of four sets of games for the Naming task and for three of four sets of games for the Mispronunciation Detection task.” In addition, non-dyslexic students outperformed dyslexics when words were 4-syllables long.

WHAT THIS MEANS: Extra care needs to be taken when students are presented with long phonetically-challenging words.

For example, in a typical science classroom, once technical vocabulary is introduced, a teacher might quickly head into a lecture about the principles being discussed although terms with similar pronunciations like “exothermic” and “endothermic” or “mitosis” and “meiosis” might easily begin to confuse students.

Taking the time to associate pictures with the new vocabulary word and keeping them plainly in view on the board before launching into the lecture can help students process the information without having to puzzle through it after they get home.

The different parts of these words can be written larger and set off with different colors or doodles to remind students of their different meaning. For instance, **EXO**thermic and **ENDO**thermic reactions can help distinguish the reactions that either release heat and light (**EXO**) or absorbs heat (**ENDO**) resulting in something that is cold to touch.

Keeping the new words prominently displayed on a handout, or overhead projector will also keep the word separate. Care still needs to be taken not to overcrowd information (leave blank spaces), however. In some cases, introducing similar-sounding, but different meaning words on different days will lessen the chances for confusion.

Interestingly, this study also found that dyslexic students outscored their non-dyslexic peers regarding the spatial location of the referring stimulus. The authors speculated that it might be that superior performance because of a particular strategy that the children took, but more research needs to be done to sort out the differences.

It might also be that the children had a greater tendency to remember the visually presented information in a spatial context; something that is not uncommon among students with dyslexia. If this is the case, strategies such as putting Post-its or posters around a room or laying out flashcards on the floor may be another helpful way to remember.

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