The Neurodivergent Classroom

Dysgraphia at a Glance

Dysgraphia isn't defined the same way everywhere. In class, handwriting, spelling or written expression can hide what a student really knows.



What you may notice in class

- Good ideas don't fully make it onto paper.
- Writing is slow, effortful or hard to read.
- Avoids tricky words and keeps writing simple.
- Getting started on writing tasks is hard.
- Sticks closely to any outline.
- Pulls back when writing is involved.
- Reading goes more smoothly than writing.
- Holding a pencil and sitting up straight are visibly hard work.
- With younger kids, handwriting and fine motor skills hide their ideas. (elementary school)
- With older students, note-taking and timed tests hide what they know. (middle and high school)

Strengths

- Their thinking shines when they say ideas out loud.
- Has good ideas, even when writing gets in the way.
- Often reads more easily than they write.
- Their knowledge is separate from their handwriting.
- Gains confidence from step-by-step writing.
- Other ways of writing let them show what they know.

What helps

- Let students say their ideas out loud first.
- Break writing into planning, drafting and revising.
- Focus on quality, not length.
- Teach handwriting regularly and explicitly.
- Offer typing, dictation or sketching as ways to write.
- Give clear routines, space and enough time.
- Name the specific writing goal up front.
- Separate content, wording, spelling and handwriting.
- Give guided notes instead of copying.
- Keep checking which way of writing really helps.
- With younger kids, offer letter practice and other ways to write. (elementary school)
- With older students, offer a keyboard, speech-to-text and clear writing stages. (middle and high school)

What tends not to help

- Asking for more writing than the student can manage.
- Treating more writing as better writing.
- Grading handwriting when it isn't the learning goal.
- Grading layout and neatness when they aren't the goal.

Words that carry

"Tell me your idea first, then we'll write it down."

"Today it's all about the content, not your handwriting."

"You can type it, say it or sketch it, too."

"Your idea matters. We'll find a way to get it down." (elementary school)

"Pick whatever way of writing best shows what you know." (middle and high school)

Where to find support

International Dyslexia Association
dyslexiaida.org/understanding-dysgraphia
Fact sheet on dysgraphia and how schools can support writing.

Understood.org: Dysgraphia
understood.org/en/articles/understanding-dysgraphia
Clear explanations and accommodation ideas for teachers and families.

Local support
Many countries have learning disability or dyslexia associations that also cover writing. An occupational therapist can advise on handwriting.

More in the Teacher Portal: neurodivergentclassroom.com/teacher-portal/dysgraphia/

Sources: Department for Education England: The writing framework · IES What Works Clearinghouse: Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers · Italian Republic: Law no. 170 of October 8, 2010 (in Italian) · World Health Organization: ICD-11, category 6A03.1