The Neurodivergent Classroom

Dyslexia and spelling difficulties at a Glance



Dyslexia and spelling difficulties mean lasting trouble with reading, spelling or both. In class, that can open a gap between what a student knows, what they can say and what they can show in writing.

What you may notice in class

- Reads slowly, haltingly, or loses their place.
- Avoids reading aloud and puts off reading tasks.
- Is clearly stronger out loud than on paper.
- Spells the same word several ways in one text.
- Mixes up, adds or leaves out letters.
- Gets unusually tired after reading.
- Avoids words they're not sure how to spell.
- With younger kids, reading aloud, letter order and first texts slow them down. (elementary school)
- With older students, textbooks and tests slow them down. (middle and high school)

Strengths

- Often shows more when speaking.
- Can explain connections they'd struggle to put in writing.
- Knows the subject, even when print gets in the way.
- Their own solutions come through when they talk.
- Clear, accessible texts open the door to the subject.
- Often keeps going despite a heavy reading load.

What helps

- Teach sound-letter correspondences systematically.
- Offer grade-level texts with text-to-speech.
- Use a larger font and about 1.5 line spacing.
- Left-align texts and keep paragraphs short.
- Grade spelling only when it's the learning goal.
- Separate ideas, wording and editing.
- Hand out clearly structured worksheets.
- Use the accommodations in the student's support plan (in the US often an IEP or 504 plan).
- Give extra time when needed.
- Let them show what they know orally or digitally.
- With younger kids, use phonics practice, read-aloud support and short texts. (elementary school)
- With older students, use text-to-speech and well-structured subject texts. (middle and high school)

What tends not to help

- Just having them copy out more of the same.
- Colored overlays as the only solution.
- Turning reading aloud into a public test.
- Grading spelling when it isn't the goal.

Words that carry

"What you know counts, even if reading and writing are hard work right now."

"You can also tell me, or use text-to-speech."

"Today we'll do ideas, wording and editing one at a time."

"Listen to the text, then show me what it's about." (elementary school)

"Use text-to-speech so what you know can shine through." (middle and high school)

Where to find support

International Dyslexia Association (IDA) dyslexiaida.org
International association with fact sheets for teachers and families.

British Dyslexia Association
bdadyslexia.org.uk
UK charity with guidance on dyslexia-friendly teaching.

Understood.org: Dyslexia
understood.org/en/articles/what-is-dyslexia
Clear explanations and classroom ideas.

Local organizations
Many countries have their own dyslexia association. Your school psychologist or special education team can point you to one.

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

Sources: International Dyslexia Association: Dyslexia Basics · IES What Works Clearinghouse: Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade · AWMF S3 guideline on the diagnosis and treatment of reading and spelling disorders, register 028-044 (in German)