



INFORMATION AND RESOURCES FOR ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS WITH DYSLEXIA—IT’S NEVER TOO LATE

Beginning in grade 4, skilled reading is necessary for school achievement in all subject areas. Beyond school, reading proficiency is just as important for job success. As we grow and mature, more and more is expected of all of us. But for individuals with dyslexia, the demands of school and the workplace are especially great.

It is often assumed that students have acquired sufficient decoding, and that their reading struggles are only comprehension related. However, struggling readers with dyslexia may have significant difficulty with word recognition and might not have established skills to identify unfamiliar words. Older students with untreated dyslexia have not benefitted from years of reading, and the exposure to various kinds of complex texts. This disadvantage may hold them back with other key aspects of reading such as vocabulary, background knowledge, and comprehension skills. It can also affect their ability to spell and write, making it difficult for them to accurately express their knowledge and ideas.

After grade 4, it is often assumed that an individual who cannot read should be assisted with accommodations and technology aides rather than receive direct reading instruction. However, a wealth of evidence shows that intensive, high quality literacy instruction can help students who are struggling build the skills they need to succeed in high school and beyond (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). In other words, it is never too late. Older students with dyslexia, including adults, can benefit from specialized reading and writing instruction, but it is essential for them to find an instructor who is highly trained to successfully teach individuals with dyslexia.

Identifying and Addressing Instructional Needs

A diagnostic evaluation will indicate all areas of reading and writing that should be addressed. If an individual has not yet established sufficient word level skills, direct instruction is necessary. “Under the right conditions, intensive and skillful instruction in basic word reading skills can have a significant impact on the comprehension ability of students in fifth grade and beyond” (Center on Instruction, 2008). The Center on Instruction’s report of research findings indicates the following are key recommendations for teaching word study to older students:

Teach students...

- to identify and break words into syllable types
- when and how to read multisyllabic words by blending the parts together
- to recognize irregular words that do not follow predictable patterns
- the meanings of common prefixes, suffixes, inflectional endings, and roots. Instruction should include ways in which words relate to each other (for example, trans: transfer, translate, transform, transition).
- how to break words into word parts and to combine word parts to create words based on their roots, bases, or other features
- how and when to use structural analysis to decode unknown words

Factors for School Success

First and foremost, an older student with dyslexia should have skilled instruction in deficit areas of reading and writing as determined by an

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evaluation. If the student cannot decode or spell efficiently and accurately, he or she will need proficient instruction in these areas to progress to more advanced levels of reading and writing.

In addition to direct instruction, the following considerations may assist in school success:

- subject area tutors;
- accommodations such as extended time and oral exams;
- modification of assignments;
- reduced course load;
- major course of study in areas of individual strength;
- small classes; and
- technology aides such as text readers, smartpen, and spelling and grammar checks.

Factors for Job Success

Individuals with dyslexia may not be alone when struggling with the reading and writing demands of the workplace. Approximately 40% of high school graduates lack the literacy skills employers seek (Achieve Inc., 2005). An adult with dyslexia may have difficulty with work-training courses, even literacy classes, if these are not presented in ways that accommodate their learning needs.

Adults with dyslexia can succeed in the workplace with training and other written materials in an accessible format, restructured job tasks, and assistive technology, for example, text reading systems, reading pens, speech recognition systems, and portable word processors with spell and grammar checking. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended 2008 (ADA) is a federal civil rights law designed to prevent discrimination and enable individuals with disabilities to participate fully in all aspects of society. The ADA protects an individual's right to request reasonable accommodations for the hiring process and on the job. A key principle of the ADA is that individuals with disabilities who want to work and are qualified to work must have

an equal opportunity to work. To be protected under ADA, you must have a disability as defined by the ADA, and you must also be able to do the job you want or were hired to do, with or without reasonable accommodations.

While early intervention is the best way to help students get on track with their reading and writing, it is never too late to help older students and adults make progress and succeed. With proper evaluation and appropriate instruction and accommodations, adolescents and adults can achieve their goals, too, and make their own unique contributions to the workforce and society.

References and Further Reading

- Alliance for Excellent Education. (2006). *Adolescent Literacy*. [Fact Sheet]. Retrieved from <http://carnegie.org/fileadmin/Media/Publications/PDF/AdolescentLiteracyFactSheet.pdf>
- Achieve, Inc. (2005). *Rising to the challenge: Are high school graduates prepared for college and work?* Washington, DC: Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. /Public Opinion Strategists.
- Kruidenier, J., Partnership for Reading (Project), RMC Research Corporation & National Institute for Literacy (U.S.). (2002). *Research-based principles for adult basic education reading instruction*. Washington, DC: Partnership for Reading.
- Torgesen, J. K., Houston, D. D., Rissman, L. M., Decker, S. M., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., et al. (2007). *Academic literacy instruction for adolescents: A guidance document from the Center on Instruction*, Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction. p. 79.

Adolescent Literacy Web Resources

All About Adolescent Literacy

www.adlit.org

This website is funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Ann B. and Thomas L. Friedman Family Foundation. It is directed to educators and parents of struggling adolescent readers and writers.

Alliance for Excellent Education

www.all4ed.org/

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a policy and advocacy organization dedicated to transforming high schools so that every student graduates and is ready for postsecondary education and success in life. It focuses on secondary-school students whose achievement is in the lowest quartile. Two of the Alliance's key reports are *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004) and *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools* (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Americans with Disabilities Act

<http://www.ada.gov/workta.htm>, or call the toll free ADA Information Line at 800-514-0301 (voice) or 800-514-0383 (TTY).

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periodicals, and assistive technology tools.

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Carnegie Corporation's Advancing Literacy Initiative www.carnegie.org/literacy/index.html

The Carnegie Corporation's Education Division began an Advancing Literacy initiative in 2003 to affect adolescent literacy policy, practice, and research. Publications include *Time To Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Success*, *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools*, and *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy*.

Center on Instruction

www.centeroninstruction.org/index.cfm

The U.S. Department of Education sponsors The Center on Instruction, whose parent group is the RMC Research Corporation from Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Included in their publications is the second edition of the *Effective Instruction for Adolescent Struggling Readers*, a revision of the 2008 version. This version presents information based on findings from *Interventions for Adolescent Struggling Readers: A Meta-Analysis with Implications*.

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