

UNDERSTANDING DYSGRAPHIA

Dysgraphia or disorder of written expression is a childhood learning disorder marked by poor writing skills such as bad hand writing, multiple spelling and punctuation errors and an inability to organize thoughts properly before putting them into words. The problem may occur independently or in association with other conditions such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) speech and reading difficulties and developmental coordination disorders; a condition characterized by clumsiness, difficulty in holding objects, unsteadiness while walking and losing balance and/or tripping.

Learning Disabilities in writing can involve the physical act of writing or the mental activity of comprehending and synthesizing information. A basic writing disorder refers to physical difficulty forming words and letters. Expressive writing disability indicates a struggle to organize thoughts on paper. Symptoms of a written language, learning disability revolve around the act of writing.

Dysgraphia is a learning disability that affects writing abilities and fine motor skills. It interferes with spelling, word spacing and the general ability to put thoughts on paper, and makes the process of writing laboriously slow. Dysgraphia is a neurological disorder that can affect both children and adults. The act of forming letters, for a child with dysgraphia, requires so much effort that the child forgets what she/ he wanted to say in the first place. Thus it's not surprising that children with dysgraphia often hate to write, and resist doing so. Dysgraphia is usually identified when a child learns to write, but it can remain hidden until adulthood, particularly in mild cases. Those with dysgraphia occasionally have trouble with other fine motor skills, like tying their shoes — but not always.

Types of Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia affects ability to write clearly, even if reading skills are normal. Types of dysgraphia include:

- **Type 1** - Dyslexia dysgraphia is where voluntary written work is illegible but copied matter is good although spelling errors are common. A child with dyslexia dysgraphia does not necessarily suffer from dyslexia.
- **Type 2** - Motor dysgraphia, here any form of written work is unclear and illegible, whether written by the child voluntarily or copied. This is due to the lack of fine motor skills, poor muscle tone and general clumsiness. Spelling skills are not affected.
- **Type 3** - Spatial dysgraphia causes difficulties in spatial awareness. This, leads to an inability to understand the size, shape and position of objects/written letters and their relation to one another while writing a sentence. Both written works as well as copied work are poor and illegible. Spelling skills may not be affected in this type.

Symptoms and Signs of Dysgraphia

The symptoms will vary according to the age of the child.

Difficulties with Spelling and Handwriting.

- Cannot identify if a word has been misspelled.
- Spells correctly orally but problems with spelling while writing.
- Spells the same word in many different ways at different times.
- Mixing of upper and lowercase letters.
- Mixing of cursive and non-cursive writing.
- Avoiding writing.



Dysgraphia is a learning disorder marked by poor writing skills such as bad hand writing, multiple spelling and punctuation errors and an inability to organize thoughts properly before putting them into words. The problem may occur independently or in association with other conditions ,

- Erases a lot.
- Difficulty reading own handwriting.
- Takes unusually long time to copy text.

Problems with Grammar and Punctuation:

- incorrect use of punctuation marks.
- Inability to write long sentences thus tend to write short sentences.
- Sometimes sentences may be very long with no full stops or space between words.

Difficulties in Spatial awareness:

- Inability to write on a line or within margins.
- Difficulties with drawing or reproducing shapes and reading maps.
- Inappropriate spacing and size of letters.
- Takes unusually long time to copy text.
- Words go in all directions and without gaps between words.

Poor Organization of Written Language:

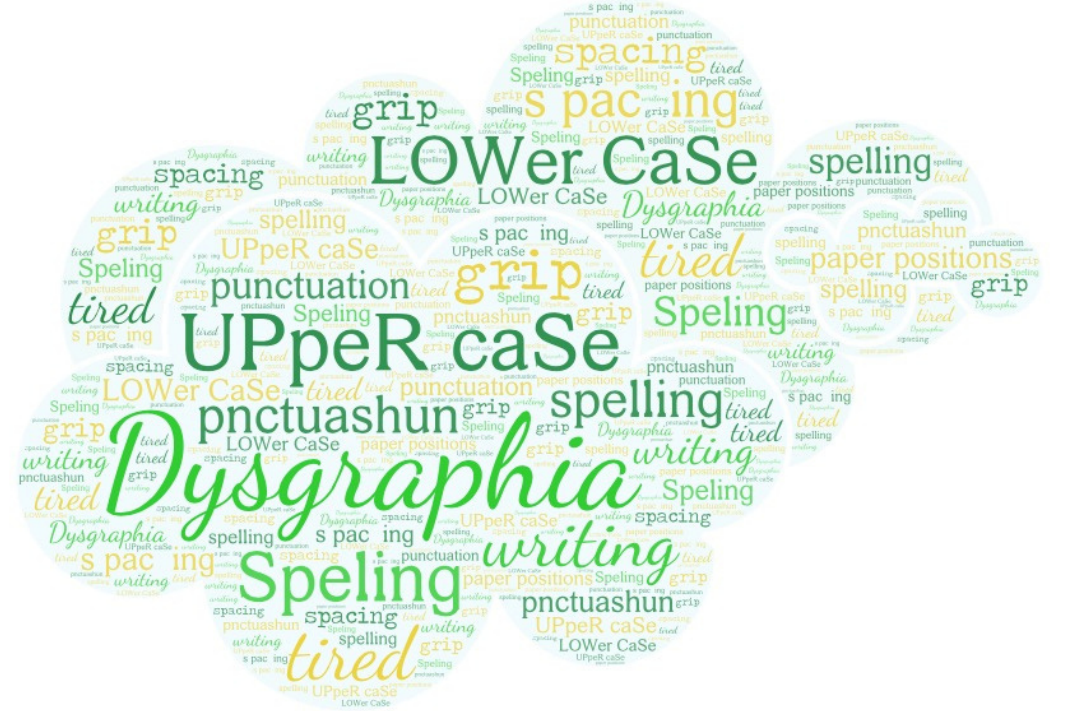
- Unable to be precise and makes the same point over and over again.
- Conveys ideas better when speaking.
- Descriptions are unclear, omitting important information or writing unnecessary points.

IDENTIFICATION OF DYSGRAPHIA

Written work in general, has a mixture of upper/lower case letters, irregular letter sizes and shapes, and unfinished letters. Students struggle to use writing as a communication tool, and a lot of effort goes into the actual writing process, which tires them out. They may have unusual writing grips, awkward body and paper positions, and may feel uncomfortable while writing. Excessive erasing may be seen as they also tend to misuse lines and margins. Difficulty in forming letters, or spacing letters may be observed along with poor organisation of ideas, poor sentence and/or paragraph structure and a limited expression of ideas. The written piece may have incorrect word usage, omission of words They may be reluctant to complete writing tasks or refuse to do so.

Some tell-tale signs of dysgraphia include:

- Awkward pencil grip
- Poor fine-motor coordination.
- Unusual position of the wrist or paper.
- Tiring quickly when writing, complaining of hand hurting.
- Poorly formed or inconsistently formed letters.
- Lack of punctuation and capitalization.
- Mixture of lower case and capital letters in sentences.
- Failing to finish words or omitting words and letters.
- Difficulty following spelling and grammar rules in writing.
- Poor sequence/organization of words in sentence.
- Writing minimum content on a page despite orally explaining ideas well.
- Difficulties in number identification and formation.
- Avoid writing.
- Poor eye-hand coordination.
- Clumsiness



Poor Organization of Written Language:

- Unable to be precise and make the same point over and over again.
- Conveys ideas better when speaking.
- Descriptions are unclear, omitting important information or writing unnecessary points.

Difficulties with fine movements of hands and fingers (fine motor skills):

- Difficulty holding a pencil correctly.
- Keeps hands, arms and body or even the paper at an awkward angle while writing .
- Inability to colour within the lines.
- Cannot use scissors properly.

Some instructional activities which improve the handwriting of children with dysgraphia:

Early diagnosis is important for early intervention. Early intervention goes a long way in supporting children with dysgraphia. After identification, following activities and strategies can use to deal with children with dysgraphia and to overcome their difficulties. Initially, children with impaired handwriting benefit from activities that support learning to form letters:

- Playing with clay to strengthen hand muscles.
- Keeping within the lines in mazes to develop motor control.
- Connecting dots or dashes to create complete letter forms.
- Tracing letters with index finger or eraser end of pencil.
- To use colourful chalk, pencils, markers and sketch pens.
- Imitating the teacher modelling sequential strokes in letter formation.
- Understanding number / arrow cues that provide a consistent method for letter and number formation.
- Covering the letter or number with a card and imaging in the mind's eye,
- Writing the letter or number from memory
- Writing letters and number as dictation.
- Begin teaching letters that have an easy formation.
- Use VKAT approach (visual, kinaesthetic, auditory and tactile) in teaching letters and numbers.
- Use physical activities and games to improve motor abilities (fine motor and gross motor).
- Activities to develop eye-hand coordination

Strategies for working with children with Dysgraphia

- Minimise the amount of writing a student is required to do.
- Encourage oral responses.
- Use paper with lines that are raised, that will act as a sensory guide to help the student to stay within lines.
- Try different pens and pencils to find one that the student is most comfortable with.
- Explore concepts such as mind mapping, spider diagrams and concept maps as a means of exploring topics or demonstrating learning.
- Adapt written activities and worksheets (e.g. instead of expecting a student to write full sentence answers, either encourage the student to fill in the missing word or circle the correct response).
- Reduce the need to copy material from text books.
- Experiment with a variety of writing utensils (e.g. thick/fine-tip marker, use of grips on pencils, etc.).
- Break tasks into small steps and allow adequate time for completion.
- Select and highlight only important and not all errors – focus on the nature of the errors (quality) rather than the number of errors (quantity).
- Give regular constructive praise and encouragement and maintain high expectations.
- Limit copying from the board.
- Acknowledge that extra time is needed by students in order to complete written tasks.
- Explicitly teach organisational skills, for example POWER for writing:

P-PLANNING
O-ORGANISING
W-WRITING
E-EDITING
R-REVISING

