

## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH STUDENTS WHO HAVE READING DISORDERS

A student with a reading disorder (“dyslexia”) reads more slowly and sometimes can’t even read their own handwriting. Allowing enough time to do homework is a must. Here are some tips:

- Break a big project up into smaller, less intimidating pieces. Have a three page paper due in a month? Encourage the student to set dates for working on little tasks related to the paper, like picking a topic, doing research, and writing a first draft.
- Always design your questions and assignments around a given conclusion or fact. Dyslexic students think in concrete wholes, that is, they work backwards from a conclusion or fact to fill in all the parts. Do not give them open-ended questions that involve abstract instructions and must be worked out in a logical, step-by-step sequence to arrive at the answer unless you have thoroughly prepared them for this.
- When possible, allow the student to use a computer to work on assignments. Eliminating the writing portion can greatly help a student’s productivity.
- Many students with dyslexia can become easily distracted with excess noise or excess quiet in the environment. When possible allow and encourage the use of an iPod/mp3 player.
- Their ability to use the correct grammar, punctuation and spelling forms may or may not improve with age. Much depends on the teaching methods the students received while learning these skills and the level of understanding that occurred when being taught.
- Focus on content rather than grammar, punctuation and spelling skills. Allow the student the opportunity to create an assignment first and then go back over it with assistance in correction of the mechanics.
- Answer the student’s questions as often as possible, but keep your answers very short, clear and specific. Be precise. Do not repeat your answers unless the student asks you to do so. Answer only what the student asks. Long explanations, different approaches, wordy definitions, or abstract thinking are all very tiring and difficult for these students who are looking for a concrete image to decode and define the word.
- If you talk too much and do not use any concrete pictures, visual descriptives, or diagrams, you will greatly reduce their ability to concentrate and make sense out of what you are saying.

\*If you have never had any experience with a person who has a disability then it is easy to feel uncertain, intimidated or frightened. It’s OK to have these feelings; it’s not OK to do nothing about them. Talk to people: people with disabilities, parents or siblings of people with disabilities, people who work with people with disabilities. Glean information: read, investigate disability information on the internet, get in touch with organizations, community groups, etc.