

Decoding Dyslexia: When Words Wobble

Kia ora whānau

Some people feel like their brain is operating at speed, but their pen is stuck? Or they have a perfectly logical sentence in their head that turns into scrambled eggs on the page? If this sounds familiar to you, you're not alone! This month, we're shining a light on dyslexia—a common learning difference that affects how people process language, particularly reading and writing. It's time to call out the myths for facts and celebrate the amazing minds that come with this different way of thinking.

What Dyslexia Is (And What It Isn't)

You may have heard the term dyslexia, but it's important to understand exactly what it means for you or someone you know.

Firstly: Dyslexia is not a disease, and it is unrelated to intelligence. In fact, many highly successful people have been dyslexic, showing that your overall ability is totally separate from this learning difference.

The core of the challenge lies in phonological processing. This means that a dyslexic person's brain has difficulty automatically and efficiently breaking words down into their component sounds (phonemes) and linking those sounds to the letters (graphemes). This is why the simple act of decoding words on a page or retrieving the correct spelling feels slow, choppy, and extremely tiring.

The Myth vs. Your Reality

Myth: "They're just not trying hard enough." The Reality: The dyslexic brain is actually working *harder* at the basic task of decoding, leading to mental fatigue and burnout.

Myth: "They must see letters backwards." Your Reality: The difficulty is with how the dyslexic learner's brain maps word sounds and structures in the language sense, not just simple visual reversal.

Myth: "It's a sign of low intelligence." Your Reality: Absolutely false! Dyslexia is a neurobiological difference; it affects literacy skills, not overall cognitive ability.

Strengths

The research shows that the way a dyslexic brain is wired leads to some notable strengths and they can excel in areas that demand different kinds of thinking, such as:

- 3D visual-spatial reasoning: The dyslexic learner often masters seeing the 'big picture' and understanding how complex systems work.
- Creative problem-solving: Because they do not rely on traditional linear methods, they can develop unique, 'out-of-the-box' solutions to challenges.
- Narrative and oral communication: They may find they are a storyteller, debater, or conversationalist, often possessing strong verbal vocabulary.

Figures like Albert Einstein and Leonardo da Vinci are cited as being dyslexic, proving that a different way of thinking can be the fuel for groundbreaking success.

New Zealand-Based Dyslexia Support

These national organisations are the best place to start for local assessments, tuition, advocacy, and resources relevant to the New Zealand education system (NCEA, MOE guidelines).

Organisation	Focus & Key Services for Families	Link
SPELD NZ (Specific Learning Disabilities New Zealand)	Assessment & Tuition: Leading provider of diagnostic assessments (recognised for NCEA Special Assessment Conditions) and evidence-based Structured Literacy tuition. Offers financial assistance and training for parents.	www.speld.org.nz
Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand (DFNZ)	Advocacy & Wellbeing: Focuses on raising awareness, advocating for systemic change, and providing resources to support self-esteem, family wellbeing, and understanding the dyslexic <i>strengths</i> .	www.dfnz.org.nz
Ministry of Education (MOE)	Official Guidance: Provides information on how schools should support learning needs, including accommodations and the use of specialist teachers (RTLb/RTLit).	Education.govt.nz z - Learning Support

Respected International Resources

These organisations offer comprehensive, research-based information and tools that are relevant globally, focusing on best practices for support and intervention.

Organisation	Focus & Key Resources for Families	Link
International Dyslexia Association (IDA)	Science of Reading & Best Practice: The gold standard for definition, research, and intervention standards (their Knowledge and Practice Standards guide many training programs). Their website offers numerous fact sheets.	dyslexiaida.org
Understood.org	Parent-Friendly Information & Tools: A comprehensive, US-based website that simplifies complex learning issues. It features guides, symptom checkers, and practical advice on accommodations and social-emotional topics.	www.understood.org
SPELD Australia	Structured Literacy Resources: While focused on Australia, their principles and resources around Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD) and Structured Literacy align closely with the	www.speldnsw.org.au <i>(Note: SPELD operates as separate state/national entities, but their foundational approach is similar.)</i>

evidence-based approach
used by SPELD NZ and are
highly credible.