



Understanding Dyslexia

Dyslexia is an unexpected difficulty in reading for an individual who has the intelligence to be a much better reader. It is most commonly due to a difficulty in phonological processing (the appreciation of the individual sounds of spoken language), which affects the ability of an individual to speak, read, spell, and, in many cases, learn a second language.

Dyslexia is highly prevalent, affecting 20% of population and representing 80-90 percent of all learning disabilities. But it differs from other learning disabilities in its specificity and scientific validation. While those with dyslexia are slow readers, they also, paradoxically, are often very fast and creative thinkers with excellent reasoning skills.

Too often dyslexia is not recognized as a serious problem and is ignored. Indeed, **dyslexia likely is a significant reason for the persistent reading achievement gap**, especially among low-income African-American and Latino children who receive less identification and intervention. “With dyslexia, the problem is not a knowledge gap, but an action gap,” says Dr. Sally Shaywitz.

We know what dyslexia is. We know the signs and symptoms and how to intervene, but when dyslexia is not acknowledged in schools, or parents have to spend years fighting for intervention, valuable time for remediation slips by.

The signs of dyslexia are evident even in the youngest of children. They include trouble learning common nursery rhymes or the names of letters in the alphabet; mispronunciation of familiar words; failing to recognize rhyming patterns like “cat” and “bat.”

Universal screening for dyslexia seldom occurs in public schools, but new tools such as the [Shaywitz DyslexiaScreen™](#) can now facilitate such screening at a



reasonable cost. **While there is no cure for dyslexia, it can be overcome.** If children with dyslexia are identified, evidence-based interventions and accommodations can change their lives for the better, allowing them to thrive at the most rigorous schools, colleges, graduate programs and professional schools.

Advocacy is important to ensure that science and the law are reflected in decisions involving intervention and accommodations. Today, **many students with dyslexia are not receiving accommodations** required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), such as extended testing time on high-stakes examinations like the SAT, GRE, LSAT or United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE).

We’ve come a long way in our understanding of dyslexia since it was first identified in 1896 by an English doctor seeking answers to the reading difficulties found in a bright 14-year-old boy. But **much work remains to ensure our country’s laws and education practices help all dyslexic individuals reach their full potential.**

> **Learn More at** <http://dyslexia.yale.edu/>