

# **SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA IN DISTANCE MODERN LANGUAGE STUDIES.**

## **A GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE**

**Dyslexia and Modern Language Learning project 2013**

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## 1. FOREWORD

Dyslexia is a processing “difference” often characterised by difficulties in literacy acquisition affecting reading, writing and spelling. It can also have an impact on cognitive processes such as memory, speed of processing, time management, co-ordination and automaticity. There may be visual and, or phonological difficulties and there are usually some discrepancies in educational performances (Reid, 2009, Mortimer, 2008)<sup>1</sup>. Difference attempts to remove the focus from difficulties and barriers to one that embraces strengths and is more positive. Positive features which are often displayed by students with dyslexia and which can enhance language learning are:

1. Love of language
2. Excellent social interaction
3. Ability to think in pictures
4. Visual processing skills
5. Holistic thinking
6. Enthusiasm, persistence and drive
7. Perception and vivid imagination,
8. Creativity, curiosity, and ambition,
9. Ability to see things differently from others and not following the crowd.

It is none the less useful to consider how and where a learning difference impacts in order to better critique the learning environment and all that goes with that.

This guide is the outcome of a staff development project developed in the Department of Languages at the Open University, UK in 2013. The project involved twelve language teachers (Associate Lecturers), four academic line managers (Staff Tutors), and a member of the University central Accessibility Team. It aimed to raise awareness among teachers of issues around tutoring adult learners with dyslexia studying Modern Language, English for Academic Purposes and English for Specific Purposes modules. The contents of this guide reflect the perspective of experienced practitioners with past and, or current experience of tutoring and supporting adult language learners with specific learning difficulties. They present key aspects which emerged from the collaborative work and the discussion on best practice which took place in the project online workspace. The specific categories around which the guide is structured are essentially those created by the teachers themselves in the project wiki with some additional material extracted from their work in synchronous and text-based online forums.

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<sup>1</sup> Reid, G. (2009) *Dyslexia: A Practitioner's Handbook*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, John Wiley & Sons Ltd. (4<sup>th</sup> Edition). Mortimore, T (2008) *Dyslexia and Learning style: A Practitioner's Handbook*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

Although the guide was initially intended for members of the OU teaching community, a look at its contents shows it is also a relevant source of information for those involved in supporting adult language learners with dyslexia in HE particularly within distance and blended learning contexts, from learner support and advisers to academic teams, as it raises points of consideration regarding information, advice and guidance (IAG). It can also be a valuable resource for the wider community of language professionals in other institutions. The different sections give the reader a choice to select the relevant information that might apply to individual roles and scenarios.

Many of the recommendations in this document apply to intervention at pre-study and in early stages of language study; mainly at beginner level. By targeting students at this level individuals will develop or improve already existing learning strategies. In addition, focusing the support on students in their early stages of language study will also boost their self-esteem and confidence increasing motivation and interest in the language. Similarly, many of the considerations and recommendations in this document do not relate exclusively to dyslexic students but can be applied to other students with Specific Learning Difficulties or Differences (SpLD) and by extent to all language learners as they follow the principle of “good practice”. In other words, good practice with students with dyslexia is good practice with all students.

Finally, readers of this guide may also find useful to look at the range of teaching and learning resources developed by participants during the project and available in the LORO repository, <http://loro.open.ac.uk/>, under dyslexia friendly tag.

The project team hopes you find this guide useful and inspiring.

## 2. PRE-REGISTRATION SUPPORT AND INFORMATION

Most HE institutions websites contain a wide range of information for prospective students regarding qualifications, modules and support. A section on “Services for Disabled Students” or similar, from which students could easily access the relevant information should be included in the website with an alternative printed version. The section should include information and links to the following areas:

- Accessible study materials . The option to obtain recorded study materials in DAISY format (Digital Accessible Information System) is particularly relevant to students with dyslexia as it may resolve problems resulting from reading difficulties. Language students should also have the option to obtain a PDF version of any materials in CD-ROM. Depending on the level of accessibility provided, the PDFs allow students to change text size and colour, search or select relevant sections and access texts through screen reading software.
- Financial support available at the institution and the Disabled Students' Allowance.
- Equipment and other services loan schemes provided by the institution for students who are not eligible for DSA. Some of the most common software on loan include text magnification, synthetic speech output and recognition software. This software allows students who find writing difficult to dictate e-mails, forum messages and assignments.
- Specific information and support for dyslexia and other learning difficulties through designated web pages. These pages should provide general advice (e.g. coping strategies) and explain what support is provided by advisers, teachers and the institution. They can also give information about the assessment of specific learning difficulties.
- Contacts for advice – with links and the Institution Disability Resources Team's contact information.

It is important that the information accessible to prospective students provides well signposted advice in the following areas:

- Assignments and assessment arrangements at the institution.
- Core skills – the following areas are particularly relevant for students with dyslexia: time management, use of forums, critical reading skills, developing academic English.
- Ongoing skills – the following areas are particularly relevant for students with dyslexia: note taking, strategic study techniques, and learning styles.
- Revising and examinations.

- Computing skills.

### **Suggestions for additional support**

Form filling can be challenging for all students, not just those with learning differences. Students with dyslexia may find form filling and, in particular completing their disclosure form or DSA application form, stressful and confusing. While support from advisers and mentors is usually provided, its availability and ways of obtaining it could be made more prominent in the institution website.

In addition, information regarding dyslexia and other learning difficulties could be accessed separately from advice on other disabilities. This is because many students with learning difficulties, including dyslexia, might not consider themselves disabled and therefore they would not necessarily look at the information contained in the section on disability.

### Languages prospectus

To help prospective students with SpLD to have a clear idea of what studying languages involves, especially if they are considering distance learning study, any Languages prospectus needs to include the following:

- A section on Specific Learning Difficulties, with a focus specifically on language study at a distance.
- A direct link to online tasters and sample materials (written, audio and online activities)
- Details of the assessment for each level.
- Screen casts of any online environment used (e.g. student forum and online tutorials).
- Realistic indication of study time. Students with dyslexia require more time to study. For instance, a 30-point module lasting 9 months could take them up to 2 to 2 ½ days of study time a week. Therefore, studying towards two 30-point modules or one 60-point module while working full-time could mean studying for 3 to 3 ½ days per week.
- Contact details of relevant learner support team and advisers that specialise in language learning.

### 3. PRE-MODULE START SUPPORT

A range of resources can be made available to students after registration through websites, tutorials and course materials. It is important that language teachers familiarise themselves with these resources to direct their students to this support when appropriate.

#### Induction website

An “Induction” website with general advice and sample materials for languages can be made available to students upon registration. From this website registered students should be able to access and download generic study skills information on the following:

- Studying with dyslexia
- Studying at a distance
- Revising for examinations
- Develop effective study strategies
- Preparing assignments – advice on essay planning and writing which can be used when writing in English and in other languages
- Giving presentations – advice on how to organise and structure an oral presentation
- Reading and taking notes– advice which can help reading and taking notes from texts in English and also MFL (Modern Foreign Languages) texts at intermediate or advanced level.

This information can be particularly useful for those who study EAP (English for Academic Purposes). It can be made available as hard-copy booklets and also in PDF format, so students can change text size and search for specific items.

Specific advice and information on language study. The Induction website should include an audio clip containing advice shared by languages students, a list of top tips given by teachers and a list of FAQs. It should also contain sections with specific advice for language students with SpLD in the form of audio-visual material. It could include:

- Dictionary skills. Video clip explaining in English how to look up words in a dictionary, how to find and distinguish between nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. There could also be practical exercises. As many dyslexic learners have difficulties selecting the most appropriate vocabulary, a video and some exercises would help them overcome the fear of using a dictionary.
- Languages study skills for beginners. Specific study skills advice is already provided by the print materials, but these could be reinforced by providing



bite-size audio-visual treatment of targeted study skills training. These could include basic skills such as dealing with grammar and vocabulary but also writing a text or giving a presentation in a foreign language.

- Language learning strategies that are particularly suitable to SpLD students. These could include the meta-cognitive approach and overlearning, i.e. approaching learning from various angles to encourage them to find various methods to learn grammar or vocabulary (e.g. using mind maps or creating a picture dictionary).
- There could be a tool in the website for students to keep a record of whether they have worked through the study skills units. These units could be revisited for individual support sessions or to refresh students' memory of useful strategies.

### Computing Guide

A Computing Guide should include a section to help users of different assistive technologies and web browser settings with explanations on how screen reader users can access websites, assessment tools and integrated conferencing systems available in their studies. It can also explain how to view websites using ePub, a technology chosen by some SpLD students to read web pages through tablets and e-readers.

All the technological tools that languages students need in the Modern Language programme need to be specified. The use of each tool should be explained step-by-step and a range of "How to ..." video clips could be inserted to demonstrate how to use selected software packages to aid language learning. For example, demonstrations could explain how to:

- 1) Use text-to-speech programmes for help with pronunciation.
- 2) Create graphic organisers, such as tables and mind maps, for organising vocabulary or planning essays and presentations.
- 3) Use Flashcard programs for vocabulary learning.
- 4) Use word processing packages to transform text copied from module materials into word format, move each sentence into a new line, increase line spacing, change background colour, and select appropriate font style and size.

### Introductory tutorial

An introduction to language study in the Modern Language study programme should be part of the introductory tutorial or day school for beginners. This session can help to identify the special needs of some students. It is also an excellent

opportunity to give an introduction to IT tools used in the course and familiarise students with study skills for language study.

### Print course materials

Print course materials can contain study skills boxes which provide the study skills support that is appropriate to each level. Activities can also provide opportunities to practise these skills. Teachers could use a text-based online forum as well as their scheduled lessons or tutorials to refer to the study skills support provided by the materials and give students opportunities for further practice.

### Student's "Additional Requirements" (AR) profile

Individual students' disability information should be made available to teachers so they can contact the students at the beginning of the academic year to identify their requirements and establish the most appropriate way of supporting them. The AR profile should also contain records of the individual support (e.g. study skills sessions) and advice already received by the student at the institution.

### Individual Language Module online information

Initial information on "Using your module web page" can help many SpLD students who find navigating through large amounts of text daunting. Using short texts, bullet points, videos and screenshots will facilitate the task.

The module web page could also provide language specific support in the form of audio-video clips. These could include:

- Basic grammar explanations: video clip explaining in English the grammar structure of the target language and providing examples. Areas that could be covered include: word classes (noun, verb, etc.); tenses, sentence structure, clauses (main and subordinate). Knowing about grammar helps dyslexic students to cope better with spelling problems in some languages.
- Pronunciation activities: video clips demonstrating all sounds of the target language and how these look in writing (phoneme-grapheme correspondence). The person videoed could pronounce the sounds and show the mouth movements so that students can see where and how this sound is produced. The speaker could repeat the sound three times, giving the students time to repeat, and could then give one or two examples to enable students to see the link between sound and spelling in the word.
- Dictation activities - very brief dictation exercises (individual words, or one or two sentences only) for key stages in beginners' modules. When listening to each clip students would hear a word/sentence, write down what they hear and then read the solution in writing in order to compare it to the

recording. This provides help in linking sound to spelling. The possibility to replay these clips can help to build confidence in dealing with sounds and letters in the target language.

- “Personal Learning Companion”: Students could be encouraged to use an individual blog. This could contain tips to build up students’ confidence on how to approach their studies effectively. Students would be able to add comments and reflections on the strategies that they have tried.

The webpage could also provide a more easily accessible explanation on ways to change background colour, font, print size and colour of online materials, and guidelines to assignments/assignment tasks, so that students can tailor these texts according to their own needs. Suggestions and explanations may include:

- 1) Using the Ctrl+ tabs to increase text size.
- 2) Changing text and background colour using different browsers. At present, this information is only provided for [Internet Explorer](#) users.
- 3) Using a tablet or a touch screen computer as these allow to easily increase text size.
- 4) Changing the browser’s settings.
- 5) Copying and pasting the chosen texts on a Word document in order to use the software functions to customise them.

Finally, if data protection permits, teachers could ask students at the beginning of the year if they would like to be put in contact with other students with dyslexia so they can work together in self-help groups to support and advise each other during their studies.

## 4. TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS: KEY PRINCIPLES

Key strategies for designing face-to face and online teaching materials include the following:

- Active learning –Avoid “lecturing” style. Use a series of tasks to introduce, explain and practise language structures and vocabulary. These include: role plays, problem solving, information gaps, discussions, matching and games.
- Discovery Learning – Give students the opportunity to analyse short written or spoken texts in order to identify patterns for themselves before offering a rule or explanation. This also promotes learner autonomy.
- Explicit teaching of phonology, orthography and grammar. Clearly include language patterns and structures in the objectives of the session and explicitly refer and explain all rules.
- Overlearning - Give students opportunities to continue studying and practising structure and vocabulary that have already been mastered. Reinforcement will help students who have short term memory and may forget what they previously learnt.
- Multisensory approach -Plan for multisensory input. Include plenty of audio and audio-visual material so that students can hear the target language while reading it and/or seeing visual representations of it. Alternatively, students can be advised to use a free text-to-speech software which supports foreign languages (such as [Thunder](#) if using Windows or Apple's built-in assistive technology if using iPad, iPhone and Mac) to see and hear words at the same time and make up their own visual representations.
- Multisensory teaching of pronunciation -Pronunciation would benefit from being learned in a multisensory way at all stages (presentation, discrimination, production, consolidation and additional activities such as paired reading and/or listening and speaking for pleasure small poems or songs). Activities could be online or on a DVD. The relationship grapheme-phoneme could also be presented and practised at the end of each pronunciation learning sequence.
- Kinaesthetic activities - Include kinaesthetic elements to provide a different approach. This might include asking students to move, mime, create something, sort cards and use props/realia.
- Audio -visual content - Maximise the use of the taught language through audio, video clips, realia and images.

- Short texts - Learning materials for tutorials and lessons should contain short texts but encourage oral utterances through a careful mix of text and images. If text is used, it ought to be subdivided in shorter, meaningful passages which can easily be identified. Different parts of texts should be clearly and logically sequenced and can be distinguished from each other through colour coding.
- Short audio clips - Avoid long audio clips, use a collection of shorter clips and encourage listening for gist. Reuse familiar vocabulary repeatedly and avoid introducing a large number of new words. Students with dyslexia need to be shown how to listen for different things in different ways (just like other students) so pre and post-listening activities are essential, whether they are picture based (e.g. a map to fill in, a photo to label, a sequence of drawings to re-order), language-based (e.g. vocabulary brainstorming, filling a table, matching target language to English equivalent...) or situation-based.

#### **4.2 Key strategies for developers of print and online materials**

- Clear learning outcomes - Key learning points should be clearly outlined at the beginning and end of units and sections, as well as in tutorial plans, preferably as bullet points (at the beginning) and checklist (at the end), as well as in online revision activities. Essential vocabulary should be clearly indicated, as students often feel overwhelmed by the amount of new language to be learned.
- Scaffolding- Provide sufficient scaffolding for each activity, e.g. pooling vocabulary before the start of an activity, asking guiding questions, using pictures as prompts, using a step-by-step approach and providing examples.
- Use of language boxes- These boxes as well as being colour-coded to distinguish them from cultural awareness or study skills boxes, should make more use of bold, colour and spacing. They could also include information in a pictorial form (e.g. using a mind-map or a rich picture). They should not be too "busy" or "crowded" with a lot of text in English explaining grammar points or translating linguistic structures.
- Staged activities - Avoid listening and reading comprehension exercises where students are required to understand the stimulus almost to the letter. Instead, provide a context, visual clues and a preparatory exercise before introducing listening and reading activities. Module teams can also reuse the same stimulus for different listening activities (gist, detailed comprehension, pronunciation/ intonation/ accentuation and finally full comprehension).
- Graphic organisers - Use tables and charts to support a variety of purposes. These include brainstorming, note-taking, focus on logical relationships, awareness-raising, conceptualisation, practice and clarification.

## **5. TUTORIAL PREPARATION**

### **5.1 First contact**

It is good practice to find out information about students by looking at their “profile information” available at the beginning of the course and to contact those with dyslexia and SpLD to discuss their requirements.

Teachers need to get to identify the strengths of their learners with dyslexia so that they can make the most of them during lessons. According to Reid (2009), individuals with dyslexia are right-brained learners who have a visual processing style. If this is the case for their students, teachers can tap their creativity, intuitiveness and ability to see the whole picture.

It is also important to discuss with the student how their dyslexia manifests itself, e.g. which tasks they find hardest (probably reading/writing), which they find easiest, which techniques they have tried and works for them ("compensatory strategies"), and how they would like to be helped.

Many dyslexic learners find it helpful to read texts written on a darker background. If this is the case for a particular student, the teacher can send a PowerPoint template containing a set of different backgrounds to choose from. The chosen background can then be used in all slides or whiteboards in lessons.

### **5.2 Before the tutorial**

Below are some strategies teachers can follow before their tutorials:

- They can E-mail and, or phone the students to remind them that the tutorial will take place the next day/that evening. Some individuals with dyslexia may need to be reminded again at short time before the tutorial.
- They can encourage students to familiarise themselves in advance with synchronous video-conference systems which may be used in online tuition. This will reduce the anxiety dyslexic students sometimes experience at the first tutorial when they have to deal with a new environment, subject, teacher and peers. It may be helpful to run a brief session (30 mins) aimed at introducing the students to the online tools. The focus should be on audio, microphone, emoticons, chat box, turn-taking (using raise-hand button) and moving objects on the screen.
- It is also useful to send the students some preparatory materials, e.g. an agenda containing the learning outcomes and lesson plan, and any materials that require reading more than just a few sentences.
- Teachers could also record their online synchronous sessions after previously asking their group for permission (check guidelines from your institution in advance). Some students with dyslexia find online live sessions

daunting and prefer to watch the recording. If they watch these several times then they can e-mail their teacher if they need further clarification or if they have additional questions.

## 6. TUTORIAL DELIVERY

### 6.1 Key strategies

The following are key principles for effective tutorial delivery which work particularly well with SpLD students.

#### Structure

Overview - Give a clear content overview of the session highlighting its structure and its key objectives. At the end of the session, ask the students which of these outcomes they have achieved and then summarise the key points in a clear and simple way.

Focus - If possible, limit the number of objectives to be covered in each session. Also, concentrate on just one area or point at the time (e.g. when talking about the past, practise only one tense or practise two tenses consecutively) to avoid confusion.

Scaffolding - Scaffold activities using a staged approach. Each learning outcome should be achieved through a number of clearly linked stages.

Sequencing – Activities need to be logically sequenced and ideally move from simple, brief close-ended activities (e.g. pairing words and pictures or underlining target structures in a text) to longer more open-ended activities. The pattern: 'guided discovery of language structures- controlled practice – freer practice' works well and provides a structure that dyslexic students can follow well.

#### Mode of delivery

Group work – Ask students to work in groups before eliciting their answers. Working in a small group is reassuring for students with dyslexia who may dislike speaking in front of the whole class. If possible, use groups of three instead of pair work – a small group provides a more supportive context and plenty of opportunities to listen to helpful models.

Plenary – Make sure plenary stages follow group work so students are more likely to answer. When asking questions, select the simplest for the dyslexic student to answer and avoid asking them to read out loud unless they volunteer to do so. If students with dyslexia are asked to read, ensure that the text has been modelled, i.e. read out before. Consider giving students thinking time before you ask them to speak.

Questions - Let the students ask you questions, too: in taking part you are providing further opportunities to listen to a native speaker, as well as good models reinforcing and consolidating vocabulary and structures.

#### Clarity



Clarity of instructions - Instructions which are given orally and written on worksheets, PowerPoint slides and whiteboards ought to be kept very brief and simple. Get students used to specific phrases in instructions, which they can easily identify and recognise. Use meaningful examples instead of long instructions. It is advisable to provide an example and, or ask one student to repeat the instruction before the group starts working on an activity.

Clarity of explanations and examples – use simple examples and clarify complex points in a clear, systematic way and by breaking the learning outcomes down into small steps.

Maintain focus - Use pointers constantly to show where you are in a text and the specific word on which you are focusing.

### **Use of time**

Thinking time - Give students ample time to understand a concept or to carry out a task. Have some short tasks ready for those who finish early.

Patience – If some students need more time, be patient and encouraging to help motivation and boost confidence. It will also promote good group dynamics and atmosphere.

### **Errors**

Error correction- Approach error corrections sensitively but do correct pronunciation as incorrect pronunciation could lead to incorrect spelling. To reduce errors, provide plenty of different opportunities for repetition and over-learning to promote automaticity (e.g. cover the same learning points in different ways: role plays, information gaps, games, acting, miming).

## **6.2 Layout and appearance of hand-outs and screens**

Background- Background of hand-outs and screens should be off-white, but it is best to check with the student for particular preferences.

Signposting- Consider introducing each group of activities about the same teaching point with a slide that introduces the teaching point. This will allow the students to clearly see when a new topic starts.

Clarity - The layout should be clear and uncluttered. Instead of using one screen/side to present all the information, present it in clear sections. Avoid using too many different colours and illustrations and too many tables, charts and graphs.

Word processing – Text and sentences should start at the beginning of a line. Use left-justified, ragged right format. Increase font size to 12 or 14 in hand-outs and 36 in screens. Avoid underlining and italicising. A simple, sans-serif typeface should be used for easy distinguishing of letters. There should be sufficient spacing between “r” and “n”, to avoid confusion with “m”; capital “l” and the digit 1 should be two separate symbols. Arial, Verdana, Trebuchet, Comic sans are good options.

Colour coding - Use colour-coding meaningfully and consistently throughout your teaching in a given module, (i.e. one particular colour for verb endings, masculine nouns, etc.). For example, use colour coding to differentiate different parts of speech, gender.

Visuals - Supply visual representations of new vocabulary, where possible. Use graphic organisers such as concept maps or mind maps and teach students to use them too. Limit the amount of text and include images used meaningfully.

## 7. MAXIMISING THE POTENTIAL OF ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION TOOLS

The following strategies could be implemented to support students with SpLD and dyslexia:

**7.1 Training-** Students with dyslexia and SpLD are often nervous about using the online room and may find the written instructions posted in the module portal difficult to follow. To help them, at the beginning of the module, arrange an introductory session to the online system and also use the first part of the first online tutorial to check that students can use the basic tools. Encourage the active and independent use of the interactive tools in the system (e.g. emoticons, voting or raising hand) among students as this is an ideal way to involve them on many levels and through different channels. Keep them active, and allow them to participate throughout.

**7.2 Recording online sessions** - Many language teachers record their tutorials (check institutional guidelines in advance). Students can watch recordings again or they can watch them if they cannot attend the sessions. Students with dyslexia should be explicitly encouraged to make use of that facility as it supports over-learning and helps to build confidence. This is a valuable resource for all students.

Note: remember to activate permissions to allow students to see the recordings and also name the recording including the Unit or main topic covered.

### 7.3 Exploiting the tools in the online synchronous system

Highlighting key information - Whether you have a lot of text or only a few lines on your whiteboard, guide your students' eye movements by:

- Hiding the text you are not going to read immediately by covering the lines using available tools. Progressively remove the cache as you read to reveal the text.
- Using a pointing tool (change from blue arrow to beige hand or red dot in order to establish a contrast between the page background, the text and the tool) while reading the text.
- Using highlighting or drawing tools to represent intonation patterns above a sentence and model that sentence following your intonation line with the pointing tool. You can ask students to repeat after you either with their microphones on (if they feel comfortable and are looking for advice) or with their microphone off (if they are nervous and would prefer private practice).

You can also ask students to do choral practice after you with their microphones off and move on or not, depending on the group, to individual practice. Note that to enable choral practice, you need to set up simultaneous speakers' facility.

### Signposting

Clear signposting helps the students to understand the structure of your tutorial and more easily follow it. These are some suggestions:

- Start with a board that lists the themes covered by the session.
- Name each board and write a topic heading for each whiteboard you use.
- Make links between activities explicit and start each new theme /activity with a board which introduces it. While the students look at this board, introduce the theme, the type of task/s that will be used and the reasons for using them. This will only take a couple of minutes and will ensure that the students understand that you are moving on to a new theme/activity. It will also slow down the pace thus ensuring that everybody is on task.

### Layout and colour

- Use as little text as possible in each whiteboard and include pictures
- Create an off-white background or paste a coloured box previously produced using PowerPoint. Fix this box to the background (right-click on it and select 'group to background').
- Apply dyslexia friendly colour and font coding.
- Increase the size of the whiteboard texts and teach the students how to increase text size of chat box messages.
- As students may find it difficult to focus on several tools at the time, consider pointing out if there is activity in the chat box. If the session is mainly based on discussion and requires limited or no use of the whiteboard, consider telling the students to detach the chat-box panel and increase its size.

## **8. SUPPORT THROUGH FEEDBACK ON ASSIGNMENTS**

Assignment marking should be treated as the direct and individual way in which teachers communicate with their students. For students with dyslexia this contact should be more personalized. It is important that teachers familiarise themselves with the general guidelines on marking the work of students with dyslexia provided by their institution. Specific guidelines for languages teachers are outlined below.

### **8.1 First contact and motivation**

Teachers are advised to:

- Find out about any personal reasons or motivation to study a foreign language that their students may have, and bear this in mind to encourage them to do their best and remain motivated and focused (this applies to all learners).
- Point out that the distance and blended learning context works well for learners who are dyslexic, because a) it uses multi-sensory learning materials, b) there is no need for handwriting, c) it encourages independent learning, so there is no pressure to keep up with other students.
- Invite the student to explain how they approach assignments, how they prepare for them, put them together and submit them. Students may be able to send their notes to teachers together with their assignment. This could help to identify any problems regarding academic and foreign language learning skills. These are examples of the kind of problems you might notice:
  - They may have been attempting literal translation.
  - They may have written too much text in one single sheet of paper and attempted then to deliver their messages using that, which would be quite difficult.
  - They may have written a line in English, and a line in the target foreign language directly underneath.

Once students' writing strategies are clear, tutors can point them in the right direction if necessary.

- Advise students with dyslexia to submit a special circumstances form with their assignments, so the Assessment Board is fully informed.

### **8.2 Explaining the teacher's role**

- It is important that tutors let dyslexic students know that they can count on their support. However, it is also important to let them know how far the

teacher's role allows to help students, particularly in terms of assignment preparation. If the student tends to request and need a great deal of support, teachers should discuss a special one-to-one session with their academic managers.

- If teachers have contact with their dyslexic student's mentor or their Specialist Dyslexia Tutor<sup>2</sup>, they should welcome and discuss any suggestions given and ensure the student is given consistent advice. Students also need to understand the different role that their teacher and their dyslexia Tutor or mentor play and the different type of support they offer. In particular, the student needs to understand that their teacher is the expert regarding the module, the assignments and the way in which these should be prepared.

### **8.3 Error correction**

- Teachers need to discuss with their learners with dyslexia which way of highlighting and correcting errors in written work might be the most effective and useful one for them. Teachers could prepare a sample page, which shows three different approaches, i.e. track changes, colour-coded highlighting of particular errors and correction of individual errors in brackets, using comment boxes.
- Students with dyslexia are likely to repeat some mistakes even after being corrected many times. Teachers should continue to correct them, but it is important not to lose patience and provide constructive feedback which will help the student to make progress but will not discourage them.
- If there are too many mistakes to correct, it is possible to correct each type of mistake in a fresh copy of the document. The student would receive several files, each covering a specific kind of mistake, e.g. incorrect use of linguistic structures and vocabulary. Teachers could consider recording a mini lesson using "Jing" to deal with specific structures. Another possibility is to mark one sentence at a time, separately. This is more feasible in shorter TMAs, as those in beginner's courses.
- In English for Academic Purposes (EAP), if the grammatical errors are many, it is advisable to focus on just two or three areas, provide feedback and useful links and possibly set up a special session to deal with these error types.

### **8.4 Feedback**

- When writing their feedback teachers need to make sure that the text is subdivided into meaningful and easily recognizable chunks or paragraphs

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<sup>2</sup> These are provided through the Disabled Students' Allowance where students are eligible.

under each marking criterion. They can use bullet points when listing specific items to break up the text.

- To motivate the student, it is important to include praise as well as constructive feedback.
- If a feedback form is used, teachers can provide feedback as well in a Word document added to the form if they want to use more formatting features to make the text more easily accessible for students with dyslexia (e.g. using colour coding, normal, bold font and numbering).
- If a student is going to fail an assignment, tutors may want to speak to him/her before returning the assignment, in order to "soften the blow".

## 9. STUDY SKILLS SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Most students need to experience learning strategies to use them successfully and also reflect on those they find helpful. For students with dyslexia, support with study skills could come as one or a combination of the following:

**9.1 Applied Study Skills Sessions** (also called "**Learning Skills Workshops**"): These are designed to allow students to experience various **multi-sensory** language learning techniques. They could be offered online to all students and recorded for students who can't attend.

### **9.2 Individual Additional Support Sessions / Special Sessions**

The purpose of additional support sessions is to address specific difficulties experienced by individual students. Examples of difficulties experienced by adult students with dyslexia studying a modern language may include: following instructions (abstract words), coping with extensive and complex texts, accuracy, and repetition of errors after correction, pronunciation, poor performance in speaking tasks and difficulty to follow referencing conventions. Some adult language learners with dyslexia may also have poor academic skills, show low participation in tutorials (due to low self-esteem) and need reassurance.

The additional support session needs to focus on individual students' needs (for instance if a student needs more scaffolding in using mind-mapping or assignment preparation techniques). Teachers could access online repositories such as LORO, <http://loro.open.ac.uk/> where "ready-made" session plans and resource are available.

Teachers should discuss the need for additional support sessions with their academic manager or with a student adviser. Students are entitled to a number of hours of additional support per course. This may be insufficient for students with SpLD who may need support in different areas (e.g. time management, preparation for the exams, study skills, grammar, pronunciation, organisation of ideas). Ideally, this support should be at least four extra one-to-one hours (e.g. two hours at the beginning of the course and two towards the end for preparation for the exams).

In addition, support sessions address the learner's learning strategies specifically (this can also be done in English rather than the target language). They should show the dyslexic students what their unique strengths are and identify ways in which they can apply these in their language learning.

It is important to remember that teachers can only show some of the techniques and strategies that could help students. The teacher can only facilitate the process by pointing at options. Ultimately it is the student's responsibility for his/ her own choice. Students appreciate to be encouraged to take responsibility for their choices and being given room and freedom to do that but bear in mind that what works for a dyslexic individual might not work for another.



## 10. IT AND ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES

Teachers should be aware of the following assistive technologies and online tools:

Screen readers - Language students may require software which can cope with several languages, even if they have to switch from one language to another while reading their course materials. For instance when scanning the Pdf version of their course book with a screen reader, they will "read" a grammar box with examples in the target language and explanations in English. Also, students who study languages can also study other subjects such as science, technology or business modules and would need text-to-speech (screen reading) and speech-to-text (dictation) software, which can cope with a variety of texts as well as graphs and charts.

Mind-mapping software – As many students with dyslexia have visual and holistic skills, they benefit from using graphic organisers such as mind maps for a range of purposes such as brainstorming, note-taking and planning essays. Many free online mind mapping tools are available (see References section). These could be introduced to students and teachers through the Computing Guide (see section 3). The guide could also explain how to export these and other graphic organisers to PowerPoint, Word and some online synchronous systems.

Mobile technology - Mobile devices allow teachers to design activities that foster overlearning and multi-sensory learning. The many apps which are accessible through these devices allow to carry out language learning tasks that require for example note-taking, recording, playing mp3 files, taking pictures and using online dictionaries.

Flashcards - Students benefit from using hardcopy flashcards with pictures and electronic flashcards with pictures and audio. These can be created by teachers and students using a range of free online tools.

Films and songs with subtitles - Video material with subtitles in the target language can be retrieved from Youtube. This allows students to practise listening comprehension and pronunciation.

Online pronunciation and text-to-speech tools - Students could use text to speech free online tools to help them to "read out" or pronounce unfamiliar or overlong words and phrases. They can type in the words, hear them spoken out loud by a native speaker at different speeds, and then repeat them. This could be a useful tool when preparing a speaking assignment and would improve the confidence and performance of the student. For example:

English pronunciation :<http://www.howjsay.com/>

Pronunciation in a range of modern foreign languages:

<http://definition.dictionarist.com/>

Free text to speech software: <http://text-to-speech.imtranslator.net/>

## Annex 1. Academic writing

Difficulty/cause	Examples	Teaching/learning strategy
Spelling Difficulty to unlearn errors. Inconsistent use of capital and small letters.	Phonological errors: (fone/phone, chose/choice, costrante/constraint) Word endings ( influence/influenced)	Teach students how to use a spellchecker and a dictionary. Encourage them to allocate plenty of time to proofreading and check <a href="#">confusable words</a> . Encourage them to see writing as a staged process that can take days and weeks and not as a product to be finished in a couple of hours.

Finding the appropriate words. This difficulty leads to slow writing speed.	e.g.: delete/reduce?	Encourage students to use a range of <a href="#">dictionaries</a> , and a <a href="#">collocations dictionary</a> .
Difficulty to form grammatical structures. Punctuation	Typical errors: Incorrect sentence structure Confusion: noun/adjective Agreements	When marking, identify and correct a small number of recurrent errors, e.g. sentence structure, use of articles, conditionals and provide model sand useful links. For example: <a href="#">Run-on sentences</a> , <a href="#">The comma splice</a> , <a href="#">Dangling participles</a> , <a href="#">The apostrophe</a> .
Difficulty organising an academic text.	They may be unable to form an argument, write in paragraphs, logically sequence and link ideas, use functional language (e.g. compare and contrast, giving examples).	1) Advise the students to start at least two weeks before the TMA cut-off date and to break the writing process into several more manageable stages. This should include: - Researching and reading - Planning - Writing the first draft - Reviewing - Re-organising and editing - Writing the second draft and further drafts. The 'Skills for OU Study' website includes the useful section: <a href="#">Preparing assignments</a> . The website <a href="#">Using English for Academic Purposes</a> contains a section on <a href="#">academic writing</a> and a sub-section on critical and descriptive functional language (select 'functions'). 2) Provide a writing frame. This <a href="#">website</a> provides some examples that can be easily be adapted for higher education students: 3) Provide a step-by-step process that students can follow when preparing and writing the TMA. This should include links to the materials.

## Annex 2. Language Learning tips visual card for students

Learning of vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Learn vocabulary in small chunks and avoid memory overloading.</li> <li>-do short intensive sessions rather than long ones.</li> <li>-learn vocabulary through reading, writing, speaking and listening but also recording it.</li> <li>-record new vocabulary as sound file so you it can be listened rather than read.</li> <li>-visualize the spelling of a word when listening to it.</li> <li>-organise vocabulary in word-families and expand with related words. Record these word groups in mind-maps or glossaries.</li> <li>-test your vocabulary regularly in the form of drills</li> <li>-revise often and in different ways.</li> </ul>
Learning grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-revise grammar because grammar knowledge makes you more confident about spelling (e.g. endings, word order in clauses, etc.).</li> <li>-plan regular revision units.</li> <li>-write grammar glossaries.</li> <li>-record your grammar explanations and listen to these recordings regularly.</li> <li>-write down a rule followed by an example</li> </ul>
Strategies supporting writing skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-use memory strategies to assist retention, e.g. mnemonic strategies (rhymes, acronyms, memorable sentences, etc.).</li> <li>-listen to language as much as possible (internet, radio, films..).</li> <li>-take notes to jog memory.</li> <li>-record passages for self-dictation (to reinforce spelling, pronunciation and syllabification rules).</li> </ul>
Communicating with your tutor and other learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-try to build contact with fellow students.</li> <li>-let your tutor know what you need and how s/he can support you best (handouts, additional session, other).</li> <li>-let your tutor know how you best learn, whether you have tried out any strategies and which ones work for you.</li> <li>-maintain contact with your tutor and group and try to attend tutorials.</li> <li>-don't be ashamed of asking for support</li> </ul>

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