Debunking dyslexia

The Argus-Simply Chichester

October 2015

Making sense of the learning difficulty in Dyslexia Awareness Week

The theme for the 2015 national event, which takes place on October 5-11, is making sense of dyslexia – looking at what impact the right support and interventions can have on the future for people with dyslexia and a focus on learning techniques that work for those with dyslexia.

Dyslexia is a term that covers many difficulties associated with reading, writing and organisation – and it can really affect students when it comes to learning material as well as exams.

It's important to make sure that having dyslexia doesn't break our confidence as there are many ways around it.

Many of my students have dyslexia and, when properly managed, those students still achieve their goals in an academic environment that can really test their skills. The trick is to find out what type of dyslexia you have and learn how your brain likes to work.

Difficulties can include:

- Misreading – slow reading.
- Miswriting – slow writing.
- Disorganisation – poor planning, recall and time management.
- Getting flustered – higher anxiety levels – low confidence.

Dyslexia – what you can do

- Get tested – it's not all the same.
- It's not a "level playing field" thing so apply for extra time in exams – your school can help with this.
- Seeing a good educational psychologist for an accurate assessment and helping with strategies for both studying and exams are essential.

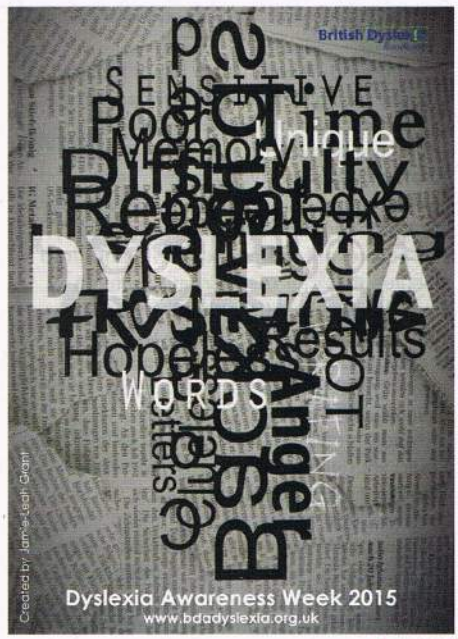
Applying for extra time in exams will take you from being disadvantaged to having as good a chance as anyone else, so make sure you do it if you're entitled to it.

You may also be experiencing stress related to bullying, social pressure, anxiety or tough times at home. You don't need to go through that alone. I've put some ways to deal with some of the more common challenges into the Other Resources section on my website excelinexams.com, so do take a read as they'll give you some strategies to help.

Many of my dyslexic students are often talented at sport or art, so let's use those skills when it comes to exam preparation and how to put information together. Remember that you can do just as well as any other student.

Studying with dyslexia

- It's important to understand what type of dyslexia you have – once you understand the nature of your challenges the school can tailor the strategy that you need.

Meet Miranda Banks - a qualified psychologist and former Olympic performance coach from Petworth, who works across West Sussex' coaching students, sports and business people. She has also developed an interactive exam preparation programme, Smartivate. Each month, she focuses on how we can fulfil our potential and go from being good to great! Contact Miranda on 01798 300666 or email info@excelinexams.com

- Be systematic – ensure you have really good organisation of your folders and when it comes to learning and memorising, have plans for doing things. Try the "checking protocol" on my website. Using a great, long list isn't going to be effective.
- Breaking the information into chunks is going to be effective – underline key points and go through it line by line – using a plain sheet of paper underneath each line as you move down the page.
- Use diagrams and draw what you need to learn rather than trying to write it down.
- Focus and distraction can be an issue – try to avoid learning that's big on reading and writing. Try and write on a whiteboard or on large sheets of paper on walls.
- Stand up rather than sitting can also help – you will probably work better when you use your whole body.
- Ask your teachers how they think you would best learn information by doing it rather than reading and writing.
- Short, sharp bursts of focus are what you need.