

Information sheet, Dyslexia in adulthood

Tips for faculty members and advisors

Students with a disability or chronic illness have special needs which cannot always be recognised and interpreted at first sight. This information sheet is intended to provide you with specialist knowledge for open and sympathetic communication in your dealings with the students concerned, and to contribute towards understanding and improving the situation of students with impairments.

Diagnosis and functional description

Today, difficulties with reading and writing are described synonymously as reading and writing disorder and Dyslexia. In the international environment, the term Dyslexia has become established (ICD-10 of the WHO). The disorder covers a bandwidth of symptoms which manifest themselves in different ways.

The main feature of this disorder is a defined and unequivocal impairment in the development of reading skills. Reading comprehension, reading speed, reading accuracy, the skill of recognising words read before, reading out loud and performance in tasks requiring reading skills may all be affected. Reading disorders are often accompanied by writing disorders. This may also be compounded by impairments in short-term memory, time management and learning organisation.

Dyslexia is a so-called specific learning difficulty with largely genetic and neurobiological causes (classified ICD-10, F81.0). In diagnostic terms, reading performance must fall short of what has to be expected on account of a person's age, general intelligence and schooling.

Dyslexia can affect different individuals in very different ways and is usually diagnosed and tackled therapeutically before the start of university studies.

Effects in the academic environment and on academically relevant activities

- Students with Dyslexia often have an increased need for structuring. Multisensory access, i.e. complementing what has been written and said with graphs, images and sound, makes learning easier for them and supports them in the acquisition and processing of learning contents. The use of technical aids for the visualisation of what has been said also proves helpful (particularly in the case of new technical terms and loan-words).
- Spelling mistakes and grammatical errors can be part of the effects of Dyslexia and should not be graded in written work (unless spelling and grammar are formulated as a learning objective).
- Many students welcome it if they are provided with course documents in advance. In this way, they are able to apply their own, individually learned working techniques and,

for instance, work on the written documents in the run-up to the course in order to be able to follow it better.

- Reader-friendly text layouts and digital documents make reading easier for people with dyslexia. If possible, texts should be made available in such a way as to be compatible with an automatic text-to-speech function and an automatic word explanation software.
- Reading out texts in front of an audience may trouble students with Dyslexia. If possible, such students should not be asked to read a text aloud.
- Writing by hand may be difficult for students with Dyslexia. The legibility of handwritten texts should be judged with a higher degree of tolerance as long as the text contents are still comprehensible.

Effects on performance assessments

Students who are affected by Dyslexia have the option of submitting an application for special arrangements with regard to **performance assessments** (information at www.ethz.ch/disability).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the staff at the Counselling and Coaching Centre. [Contact persons – student portal | ETH Zurich](#).