How to Avoid Dyslexia Discrimination in the Workplace

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It’s estimated by Dyslexia Action that 6.3 million people in the UK have the learning difficulty dyslexia, which is around 1 in 10.

Therefore, it is likely your business currently employs or will employ someone with dyslexia.

Under the Equality Act 2010, dyslexia is classed as a disability. This means, to prevent discrimination and comply with the Act, you are required to make suitable adjustments if people with dyslexia require it.

This guide covers the following topics:

- What is Dyslexia Discrimination?
- How Does Dyslexia Cause Difficulty at Work?
- Preventing Dyslexia Discrimination During Recruitment
- Preventing Dyslexia Discrimination in the Workplace
- Further Resources
What is Dyslexia Discrimination?

Discriminating against someone with dyslexia in the workplace means that you haven’t provided the necessary tools for them to apply for a job, or fulfil their job role, without difficulty – particularly if they have requested it.

**Dyslexia discrimination is often unintentional.** When employers lack dyslexia awareness and simply provide everyone with the same basic tools and information, they inadvertently put people with dyslexia at a disadvantage. Despite lack of intention, it is discrimination nonetheless.

This is why the best way to prevent dyslexia discrimination is by making adjustments from the very start. At the very least, businesses should make it clear to newly-hired employees – perhaps in the employee handbook – that should anyone need support for a disability, the company will provide it on request.

**Employers must take action if someone with dyslexia reveals their disability,** especially if they specifically ask for adjustments and supportive resources. In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, it’s illegal to refuse any reasonable request, such as proofreading software.

**Managers should also be perceptive to how employees get on with tasks.** If team members appear to struggle with an element of their job and you suspect it could be linked to dyslexia, you can make reasonable accommodations to help with those challenges, such as assistive software. Be careful not to make assumptions though; always talk to the person about their struggles first and see what they’d like to do.
Most adjustments are very affordable and easy to implement. Simple adjustments are well-worth the investment if they enable employees with dyslexia to work to their full capacity. Plus, having multiple options for accessing information can even benefit those without dyslexia.

You can find out more about reasonable adjustments in the workplace section of this guide.

How Does Dyslexia Cause Difficulty at Work?

The barriers caused by dyslexia vary from person to person. Tasks that require little to no effort for some people – such as writing emails or following instructions – can be complex, anxiety-inducing processes for those with dyslexia.

One of the most prominent and well-known effects of dyslexia is a weakness in literacy skills. However, that isn’t the only thing to consider.

Dyslexia often affects a person’s memory, ability to process, store, and recall information, and their organisational skills or awareness of time.

Common difficulties caused by dyslexia include:

- Reading and writing typical forms of information and communication. For example: emails, information sheets and documents, letters, website pages, chats, reports, etc. Proofreading and word processing software alleviates the stress posed by these tasks.
- Tasks that involve numerical data. Dyslexia affects numeracy skills as well as literacy. Access to a physical calculator is beneficial.
- **Learning and recalling factual information.** This is especially true if information is in text form only. Reminder systems and records reduce reliance on long-term memory storage, and text-to-speech software and features on word processing software help with processing information.
- **Meeting deadlines and managing time.** Many people with dyslexia struggle to tell and track time, which leads to difficulty with time management. Likewise, challenges with information processing can slow project completion. The right software and access to reminder systems help alleviate these challenges greatly.
- **Following complex instructions.** Instructions that are too detailed or given out of order can be overwhelming and a challenge to follow. Give instructions verbally and in written form to assist with information processing.
- **Other difficulties include difficulty with concentrating, problems with verbal communication, and visual stress** (when text appears distorted or ‘moves’).

Because these challenges are not visually apparent – making dyslexia a ‘hidden’ disability – they’re easy to overlook. Unfortunately, they are sometimes chalked up as laziness or inability, neither of which are accurate.

**People with dyslexia simply need tools and strategies that are suited to the way their brain works to deliver their best work.**

It’s also crucial to note that many people with dyslexia develop their own coping strategies during adolescence and continue crafting strategies way into adulthood. However, when under undue stress or when accommodations are lacking, their strategies can fail, leaving your employees feeling vulnerable and disadvantaged.
Preventing Discrimination During Recruitment

Whilst language is an important part of the recruitment process and analysing language can help you hire, it can be a barrier for people with dyslexia. Reading job applications, completing technical tests, filling out applications and maintaining concentration levels can present difficulty for some.

The phrasing and terminology used in your recruitment ads and interview process make a significant difference to who applies and the candidate’s performance in the interview.

There are numerous ways businesses can accommodate the needs of people with dyslexia when putting together job advertisements and interview processes – and in turn prevent dyslexia discrimination.

To create dyslexia-friendly job adverts, you can:

- Consider providing an audio or video version of job adverts in addition to written ones. Having an alternate format reflects positively on the business and attracts a range of skill sets. It is both inclusive and creative, which may also make your advert stand out.
- Write job adverts and interview materials in plain English – avoid jargon and complex sentences.
- Make use of short paragraphs and bullet points to divide up the text on job adverts and interview materials.
To avoid dyslexia discrimination during interviews, you can:

- Keep interview questions **brief**.
- Use **visual aids** for interview presentations and materials.
- Keep interview presentations **reasonably short and concise**, and provide plenty of pauses and opportunity for interviewees to absorb the information and ask questions.

To avoid dyslexia discrimination during technical tests, you can:

- Provide **assistive options**. Enable **spelling and grammar checking** by allowing access to the internet or by installing suitable **word-processing software**, e.g. Microsoft Office or **Grammarly**. Provide a dictionary for offline tests.
- Word processing software, such as Microsoft Office, is also especially beneficial because you can **alter the colour of the page** through the design menu. Changing the background colour can help people with dyslexia read text easier, as black text against a white background aggravates visual stress.
- Set a **dyslexic-friendly font** to default on word-processing software. Examples of standard fonts include Arial and Tahoma. **Specially-designed fonts for dyslexia** that you can download for free or purchase include Sassoon, APhont, Read Regular, or **Open Dyslexic**.
- Install suitable **text-to-speech software** on computers.
- Allow **plenty of time** for the completion of technical tests – if a person reveals they are dyslexic, give them extra time.

The exception to the above points is when the candidate is required to proof without tools, e.g. a book editor. In this situation it is a **genuine occupational qualification** to require someone without literacy difficulties.
If a candidate takes the test with all the adjustments provided and still falls short of the business’ required standards, it’s acceptable to decide they are not suitable for the role. But if no support was provided and you refuse them the job, then you have inadvertently discriminated against their disability.

Preventing Discrimination in the Workplace

Methods and tools for preventing dyslexia discrimination are very cost-effective and easy to integrate into the business. They help effectively remove barriers and create a fairer work environment for people with dyslexia.

Accommodations should be implemented proactively, i.e. without prompt, but also reactively if a person with dyslexia does request assistance.

Managers should liaise with employees to determine what specific areas they struggle with, as no two people with (and even without) dyslexia are identical. They can work to implement adjustments that cater to the individual needs of the person with dyslexia. In fact, many accommodations can benefit other employees too, so are a valuable investment for the whole team.

Try implementing these accommodations:

- Install Microsoft Office and Grammarly on all users’ computers.
- Install dyslexia-friendly fonts e.g. Open Dyslexic and set them to default on word-processing software and browsers etc.
- Install text-to-audio software on all computers.
- Provide practical training where possible; hands-on learning is often more effective than written instructions for people with dyslexia.
- Assign someone else to take meeting minutes (unless they want to, of course!)
- Encourage regular breaks to relieve eye strain from computers – breaks are beneficial to all employees using display screens.

Ways to adapt documents and instructions for employees with dyslexia:

- Provide both verbal and written instructions. These shouldn’t be convoluted or excessive. Encourage employees to ask questions.
- Highlight key points in documents/emails and use bolding. Try to avoid underlining, italics or block capitals as this can distort the traditional shape of letters and make the text ‘run together’.
• Print and write information for people with dyslexia on coloured paper. Use cream or a soft pastel colour; some people with dyslexia have colour preferences such as blue or green. Also, make sure the paper is not transparent or opaque.

• Discuss key points of documents verbally. This can help with absorbing meaning; employees will gain a stronger grasp of what it’s about beforehand.

• Makes use of visual aids. Diagrams, drawings, and flowcharts on documents break up the text and provide further clarity for those with dyslexia, making the information easier to process.

Adapting verbal communication for employees with dyslexia:

• Speak clearly and in plain English. Avoid using jargon, speaking too quickly, and going off on tangents. Utilise pauses so you and the listener have a moment to collect thoughts.

• Keep meetings succinct. Try to avoid letting them run for longer than is necessary; stick to the point. Ensure a colleague takes minutes that are shared after the meeting, in case any key points are missed.

• Communicate in a logical order. Particularly when giving instructions, provide them one at a time and sequentially. Give the listener opportunity to ask questions and double check instructions if there’s ever any uncertainty.

• Be understanding and patient during discussions. Some people with dyslexia – and even people without dyslexia – lack verbal fluency or volume control, making conversations difficult. Don’t interrupt people when they talk.
Time management & organisation considerations for employees with dyslexia:

- **Offer a private or quiet work space.** Some people with dyslexia may have difficulty working around others or excessive noise.
- **Remind them of important deadlines.** Timekeeping is difficult for some people with dyslexia, so a gentle reminder every now and then will be appreciated. It is a good idea to keep a calendar containing key dates.
- **Encourage use of calendars and alarms.** These help to track time in a more visual way which can be helpful.
- **Provide tools and technology they request where possible.** If a certain piece of equipment is required to minimise challenges posed by dyslexia, as long as it is reasonable and will remove barriers you should provide it.

Accommodating the needs of your staff members is not only your duty as an employer, but it makes good business sense. It can improve employees’ productivity and motivation, whilst also promoting a culture of equality amongst your team.

**Further Resources:**

- [Equality and Diversity Interview Questions – What Can I Ask?](#)
- [Equality and Diversity Policy Template & Guidance](#)
- [How to Support Others to Promote Diversity, Equality and Inclusion](#)