



Written Expression Difficulty Infosheet

A Specific Learning Disorder with Impairment in Written Expression, formerly known as Dysgraphia, is difficulty with spelling and written expression

Children and adults with a Specific Learning Disorder with Impairment in Written Expression often have difficulties with spelling, grammar, punctuation and organisation of written tasks.

A Specific Learning Disorder with Impairment in Written Expression is a brain-based (neurological) disorder or disability. People with a SLD in Written Expression often have to work much harder and longer to produce written work to the same standard as another individual. Children and adults with a SLD in Written Expression often have a family history of reading and/or spelling difficulties.

What are the indicators of a Specific Learning Disorder in Written Expression



- Inaccurate spelling
- Difficulties with the use of grammar and punctuation
- Difficulties with organisation of sentences and paragraphs
- Avoids writing
- Slow to complete literacy tasks
- Shows anxiety about school or signs of low self-esteem
- Difficulties with working memory
- High school students will have many of the same difficulties as primary school aged children but difficulties with writing become more apparent as expectations about the production of written work increase.
- Students may generally avoid writing and have increased school-based anxiety or low self-concept or self-esteem.



How is a Specific Learning Disorder with Impairment in Written Expression identified?

An educational assessment or diagnosis can be an important step in identifying strengths and weaknesses, assessing the best approach to intervention and ruling out other causes and comorbidities for a child or adult who has difficulties with spelling and written expression.

A Specific Learning Disorder with Impairment in Written Expression is generally diagnosed by a psychologist. The psychologist will investigate learning strengths and difficulties. (The diagnosis of a specific learning disorder cannot be made by someone who assesses vision, hearing, movement or any other skill in isolation.)

Tests used in an assessment may include standardised measures of: intellectual ability and cognitive skills, expressive and receptive language ability, underlying processing strengths and weaknesses and academic achievement across a range of domains.

An occupational therapist with a paediatrician is able to diagnose difficulties with handwriting and fine motor skills.

“prior to a formal assessment, it is important to ensure that children are provided with well-designed instruction targeting the area in which the child is struggling. This instruction should be explicit, systematic and cumulative and needs to form the basis of an intervention that continues for at least six months.”

Understanding Learning Difficulties Guide for Parents, 2019

Before a diagnosis of a Specific Learning Disorder with Impairment in Written Expression (formerly known as dysgraphia) is able to be made, it is essential that the child or adult being assessed has received at least six months of intervention focused on improving their written expression and spelling.

Intervention to support a person with a Specific Learning Disorder with Impairment in Written Expression

Students with a Specific Learning Disorder with Impairment in Written Expression can improve their written expression and spelling skills.

Early identification and early intervention can make a significant impact for students with an SLD in Written Expression to ensure they do not fall too far behind in the development of their spelling and writing. Students benefit from explicit and structured instruction in spelling, grammar and written expression skills, including punctuation, grammar and sentence and paragraph formation.

Students with an SLD in Written Expression will generally need lots of opportunities to practise written expression and spelling skills and so can benefit from working with learning support teachers, systematic synthetic phonics and morphology intervention and written expression programs or working with experienced tutors.

Adjustments to support a person with written expression difficulties

Students and adults with SLD in Written Expression can benefit from adjustments made to their school or work environments.

“An ‘adjustment’ is a measure or action taken to assist a student with disability to participate in education and training on the same basis as other students.”

Students with Disability, The Australian Curriculum

Adjustments to learning are very important for students struggling with writing and spelling and should be implemented in conjunction with appropriate intervention.

Adjustments need to be tailored to the individual and will change over time.

Adjustments include:

- limiting the amount of writing required providing outlines, summaries, vocabulary words and word banks
- extra time to complete tasks
- avoiding copying notes from the board
- allowing students to express knowledge verbally
- assistance with spelling, writing and editing (eg. use of a word processor, predictive spelling, scaffolded writing tasks, speech to text software)
- making allowances for poor working memory in relation to giving instructions and general school organisation
- directly sending parents/carers important information, homework and assessment tasks