

**DYSLEXIA DYSPRAXIA ADHD**

**Maths difficulties Visual stress Emotions**

**A GUIDE for SIXTH-FORMERS**

**(and their parents)**

**by**

**Dr Sylvia Moody  
Practitioner Psychologist**

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Dr Sylvia Moody  
22 Wray Crescent  
London N4 3LP  
[symoody@aol.com](mailto:symoody@aol.com)  
[www.sylviam Moody.com](http://www.sylviam Moody.com)

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## Sixth-form challenges

Many sixth-formers who have one or more of the specific learning difficulties (SLDs) listed above may have done reasonably well at school up to the GCSE level – though perhaps at the cost of working longer hours than their fellow students. They may, however, find that their GCSE grades are below the level that was predicted. When such students enter the sixth form, they face greater challenges: they are required to study more intensively, to do large amounts of reading, to produce longer, more complex pieces of written work, and to independently organise their study and revision schedules.

In this Guide I'll describe in detail the various problems with study that a sixth-form student with SLDs is likely to encounter and give advice on preparing for university. But I'll begin by explaining what sorts of difficulties lie behind the each of the above 'labels'.

Generally when members of the public are asked what they think these 'labels' mean, typical replies are as follows:

dyslexia	a reading problem
dyspraxia	clumsiness
ADHD	restlessness
dyscalculia	can't do sums
visual stress	eye strain

These descriptions, however, are too narrow to be helpful. Each of the above terms actually refers to a syndrome of difficulties. These are now described below:

## Dyslexia

The term 'dyslexia' was originally coined to mean 'poor reading', because this was the difficulty most in evidence when children were in primary school. However, when we look beyond primary school to difficulties experienced by sixth-formers and college students, it becomes clear that this definition is too narrow. At this advanced level poor reading becomes just one element in a collection of difficulties that all result in one way or another from weaknesses in more fundamental skills, i.e.

- (i) auditory short-term memory;
- (ii) visual short-term memory;
- (iii) visual tracking skills.

These abilities are things that we are born with and so stand in contrast to reading, spelling and writing, which are learned skills.

To look now at these basic abilities in detail:

### *Auditory short-term memory*

This is the memory you use to remember something that you have just heard, for example, a telephone number, some instructions you have just been given, something a teacher has just explained. It is also used when you are:

- reading quickly through a text and trying to remember and understand what you have read
- structuring lengthy pieces of written work
- keeping track in your mind of tasks to be done
- trying to speak in a succinct way

#### *Visual short-term memory*

This memory is used for remembering material that you have just seen and need to keep in your mind for a few moments – for example, a diagram, a map, written instructions, the words you have just looked at when reading a text.

#### *Visual tracking*

Visual tracking is the ability to look at a series of words or numbers and see the components of these (i.e. letters or figures) in the right order. If your visual tracking is slow and inefficient, then you will not be able to get words or numbers quickly into your visual short-term memory, and so you will find it hard to understand what you have just read – probably you will find you are reading things two or three times before you completely understand them.

Poor visual tracking can also result in your:

- losing your place when reading
- reading numbers or letters the wrong way round
- mis-reading or mis-sequencing numbers and letters – for example reading *despite* as *despise*, *cast* as *cats*.

#### **Dyspraxia**

Dyspraxia is often taken to mean simply difficulties with physical co-ordination (clumsiness). However, it is now thought more useful to regard dyspraxia as being a general problem with *organisational skills*. This problem can show itself at different levels: it may be at the

- (i) physical level, i.e. a problem with the organisation of muscles, and so causing clumsiness, e.g., with handwriting or using laboratory equipment;
- (ii) visuo-spatial level, e.g., difficulty with catching balls, parking cars, scanning complex diagrams or tables of figures);
- (iii) cognitive (“brain”) level, in which case it would affect things such as organising

- thought, speech, written work, study schedules;
- (iv) social skills level, e.g., standing too close to people, speaking too loudly dominating a conversation.

In sum, dyspraxia is a complex condition and often not understood, as it includes a number of difficulties which may not, at first glance, seem to be related. It often overlaps with both dyslexia and ADHD.

## **ADHD**

This is characterised by procrastination, lack of concentration, being easily distracted, feeling constantly restless in mind and body, speaking/acting impulsively. It is often accompanied by distressing emotions: anxiety, frustration, lack of self-esteem, depression. Obsessional behaviour patterns may sometimes also be present.

At school students with ADHD have difficulty concentrating in lessons and also find it difficult to settle down to study. They are always ‘on the go’ and have thoughts constantly racing through their head – consequently they have difficulty in getting to sleep and so also in waking/getting up in the morning. They tend to have poor time-keeping and are often late for lessons.

When working on their own they have a tendency to ‘drift off’ and forget what they are doing. They are experts in procrastination and often put off starting assignments or revision. In examinations they have difficulty ‘staying on task’ and are easily distracted by small movements or noises in their immediate environment – for example, a fellow student shifting position or shuffling some papers.

## **Maths and number difficulties (often termed “dyscalculia”)**

These include making careless mistakes when reading, copying and writing numbers, understanding maths problems, carrying out calculations and keeping one’s place in a complex array of figures, such as statistical tables.

The above difficulties may indicate a specific weakness in maths, but it is important to note that they can also be caused by dyslexic and/or dyspraxic and/or ADHD difficulties, e.g., by poor auditory and/or visual short-term memory, poor visual tracking ability, or simply poor concentration.

## **Visual stress / binocular problems**

*Visual stress* is characterised by:

- seeing letters or numbers ‘jumping about’ on the page
- seeing text as distorting

- seeing white 'rivers' running down the text
- finding complex patterns difficult to look at.

*Binocular problems* are characterised by:

- missing out words
- mis-reading words
- losing your place on the page

The above problems are often also accompanied by headaches and sore eyes when you are reading.

These problems are very common, especially among students who have the SLDs described above. *It is important to note* that they are not usually investigated in routine eye tests. So, irrespective of whether you have:

- (a) been told that you have no visual problems; or
- (b) have already been prescribed glasses/lenses

if you recognise the symptoms listed above, you need to make an appointment with a specialist optometrist. Such an optometrist is likely to prescribe coloured overlays and/or eye exercises. With appropriate treatment these difficulties generally become less troublesome.

*It is important to note* that very few optometrists/ophthalmologists test for these problems, and if you make an appointment for an assessment *it is essential* to check with the optometrist that they will be looking for *both visual stress and binocular problems*. Two recommended practitioners in North London (who offer weekend appointments) are:

Barnard Levitt Associates, 58 Clifton Gardens, London NW11 7EL 020 8458 0599  
 reception@eye-spy.co.uk

DF Optometrists, 148 Chanctonbury Way N12 7AD, 020 7754 0372  
 david@dfoptometrists.com

You can also do some self-help by getting a pleasing background colour on your computer screen, using notebooks with coloured paper, printing onto coloured paper, using a coloured overlay (available from Crossbow Education [www.crossboweducation.com](http://www.crossboweducation.com)

## Difficult emotions

If you have any or all of the above-described difficulties, you may feel a number of distressing emotions, for example: anxiety, lack of confidence, poor self-esteem, despondency, anger, confusion, embarrassment, depression.

Many students whose specific learning difficulties have not been recognised or properly addressed during their early school years report emotions such as these. However, once they have come to a good understanding of their difficulties and have accessed appropriate help, then their emotional state tends to improve.

## **Tackling A-levels**

If you have had an assessment which has found you to have one or more of the difficulties described above, you will qualify for concessions in your A-level examinations. These could include, extra time, use of a laptop or scribe, taking the examinations in a separate room.

During the two years you are preparing for A-levels, it is important that you hone your study skills. You will probably be given help with this at school but you can also independently improve your skills by reading one or more of the books listed at the end of this article and putting into practice some of the study techniques that they recommend.

## **Preparing for college / university**

Applying for funds to finance your study needs is a two-stage process:

- (1) Diagnostic assessment;
- (2) Needs assessment.

This process can be begun *before* you start your university course. (The diagnostic assessment can also, if required, provide proof of your need for concessions in your A-level examinations.)

### **1. Diagnostic assessment**

The diagnostic assessment will identify your strengths and weaknesses in relation to study. The cost is likely to be around £400, and your university may pay part of this. The Disability Department at your university will provide a list of recommended assessors; and you can also get recommendations from the help organisations listed at the end of this article.

When you contact an assessor, you need to check that he/she can cover dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD and, if relevant, dyscalculia. Ideally the assessor would also check for visual stress.

If you would like to arrange the diagnostic assessment *before* you go up to university (and this is advantageous, as it will mean you will be able to access help more quickly when you start your course), *be sure to check that the Disability Department approves the assessor you have chosen*. You should also ask the Department if they will retrospectively fund at least part of the assessment fee, if you are found to have specific learning difficulties.

### **2. Needs assessment**

This assessment can also be done before you go up to university. The assessment does not involve tests. The needs assessor will look at your diagnostic report and discuss with you precisely what help you will need at university in respect of skills tuition, IT support and special accommodations. According to which course you are following, the needs assessment will be funded by either:

- (i) Student Finance England (SFE), or
- (ii) NHS

(i)

To apply to **SFE** for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), complete the application form (DSA1) on the SFE website. You then need to **post** to SFE your application form as well as *proof of your disability*, e.g., a diagnostic assessment report.

Be sure to send your application to SFE *by recorded delivery* and to put on the *correct postage*. The address is SFE, P O Box 210, Darlington, DL1 9HJ.

Students in Wales: [www.studentfinancewales.co.uk](http://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk)

Students in Scotland: [www.saas.gov.uk](http://www.saas.gov.uk)

Students in Northern Ireland: [www.studentfinanceni.co.uk](http://www.studentfinanceni.co.uk)

(ii)

To apply to the **NHS**, go via the online BOSS system.

Once your funding body has sent you their letter accepting your application for funding, you can proceed to arranging your **needs assessment**.

Needs assessors work at Access Centres, and your local centre can be found at [www.dsa-qag.org.uk](http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk) Be sure to take all relevant documents e.g., diagnostic report, with you to the assessment.

Your needs assessment report usually arrives within 20 days. If there are factual errors in the report, contact the centre/assessor **within three days** to request corrections.

After three days, the report will be sent to your funding body. Expect a confirmation letter within three weeks.

## **Help and support at college**

This could include:

- skills training;
- IT support / technological aids;
- optometry (for visual stress / binocular problems);
- mentoring / GP referral for ADHD;
- social skills training;
- general counselling;
- concessions for coursework and examinations.

If poor physical co-ordination is causing a problem, e.g., with handwriting, laboratory work, a referral to an occupational therapist can be arranged either through the college medical centre or through [www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk](http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)

If attention deficit disorder is a problem, referral to a specialist could be arranged through the college medical centre or privately through [simplywellbeing.com](http://simplywellbeing.com).

For more detailed information on assessment and accessing help at college, visit  
<http://sylviamoody.com/dyslexia.html> and click on the section for students.

## **Further information**

For general advice, help and recommendations for an assessor, contact:

British Dyslexia Association 0845 251 9002 [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)  
Dyspraxia Foundation 01462 459 986 [www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk](http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)  
Simply Well Being 020 8099 7671 [simplywellbeing.com](http://simplywellbeing.com) (for ADHD)  
ADDERS [adders.org](http://adders.org) (for ADHD)

The following books may be useful:

### Dyslexia

*Dyslexia: a Teenager's Guide.* Sylvia Moody. Vermilion Press.

*Dyslexia: Surviving and Succeeding at College.* Sylvia Moody. Routledge.

*Making Dyslexia Work for You.* Vicki Goodwin and Bonita Thomson. Routledge.

## Dyspraxia / ADHD

*Living with Dyspraxia* by Mary Colley. Jessica Kingsley.

*That's the Way I Think – dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD explained.* David Grant.

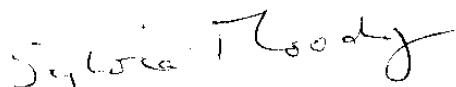
David Fulton Books.

*How to Succeed at College and University with Specific Learning Difficulties.*

Amanda Kirby. Souvenir Press.

Below are more details of two of the books listed above.

I hope you find this information helpful and wish you the best of luck in your studies at college or university.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sylvia Moody". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Sylvia" on the first line and "Moody" on the second line.

Dr Sylvia Moody

Practitioner Psychologist

[symoody@aol.com](mailto:symoody@aol.com)

[www.sylviamoody.com](http://www.sylviamoody.com)

## DYSLEXIA: A TEENAGER'S GUIDE

Dr Sylvia Moody

Random House (Vermilion)

**Dyslexic teenagers face special problems.**

**This book, which speaks directly to the teenager, will help solve them**



Dyslexia - involving problems with reading, writing, spelling, memory, organisation and time management - can affect people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. But most books on this subject are geared towards young children; advice for teenagers is thin on the ground. Yet dyslexic teenagers face special problems. They need to master complex study skills, deal with large amounts of revision, and cope with the demands of examinations. They may suffer from stress, anxiety and lack of confidence.

DYSLEXIA A TEENAGER'S GUIDE helps young adults tackle these problems with strategies uniquely suited to their needs. Clearly and simply written by a leading expert in the field, the book helps with reading, writing, spelling and memory, as well as giving tips on how to take notes, organise study, deal with examinations and use IT. It also shows how to improve confidence, deal with stress, and build on the creative talent that many dyslexic people possess.

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Dr. Sylvia Moody is a psychologist and psychotherapist. She has written five books and numerous articles on dyslexia in the teenage years and in adulthood. She works in north London.

For more detailed information on dyslexia in the teenage years, please visit:

[www.sylviam Moody.com](http://www.sylviam Moody.com)

Dyslexia: Surviving and Succeeding at College

by

Dr Sylvia Moody

Routledge



\*Dyslexia Book of the Year 2009\*

(World of Dyslexia)

This book, published by Routledge, is the third in Dr Moody's Lifetime Dyslexia Guides series. The other two books (already published by Random House) are *Dyslexia: How to Survive and Succeed at Work* and *Dyslexia: a Teenager's Guide*.

*Dyslexia: Surviving and Succeeding at College* is a practical and easy-to-read guide for dyslexic and dyspraxic students. Clearly and simply written, in a dyslexia-friendly format, it addresses not just study skills, but also more general aspects of coping with student life.

Each chapter includes step-by-step strategies which can be put into practice from the very first day at college. You will learn how to

- read accurately and quickly with good comprehension
- take notes efficiently from books and in lectures
- research and plan essays and scientific reports
- contribute confidently in seminars
- develop good memory strategies for study and everyday life
- organise your time and plan your work

Sylvia Moody recognises that adapting to student life generally is as important as developing study skills. Guidance is given to assist you in finding your way around campus, building relationships with tutors, managing emotional development and preparing for the world of work. Full of invaluable self-help strategies, this book will empower you to improve your skills in all areas. The book will also be useful to subject tutors who wish to learn about dyslexia, and to dyslexia tutors and co-ordinators who want to give practical advice to their students.

[www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)    [www.routledge.co.uk](http://www.routledge.co.uk)    [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

**Website with comprehensive information for students: [www.sylviamoody.com](http://www.sylviamoody.com)**

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