

How to Spot Dyslexia

In a Writing Sample

By Susan Barton
Bright Solutions for Dyslexia

Who is Susan Barton?

- Founder
 - Bright Solutions for Dyslexia
 - www.BrightSolutions.US
- Developer
 - Barton Reading & Spelling System
 - www.BartonReading.com
- Creator of dyslexia professionals
 - Summer seminars
 - Used to do those seminars in-person
 - Will soon offer them on-line

Here's what I look like



Typical situation

- Parents suspect dyslexia
 - Many early warning signs
 - Close relatives with dyslexia
- Child is still doing "okay" in school
 - Not badly enough to test for Spec Ed
- Parents want my opinion
 - Before they invest in outside testing or tutoring
- Send me a writing sample

Why?

- Written expression is always the weakest skill
 - in someone with dyslexia

Writing samples can be

- Composition – first draft
 - Final draft okay only if original errors are visible
- Spelling test
 - Student did not do well
 - Even after studying all week
- Worksheet
 - Where they had to write in the answers



Goal

- To show you what I look for
- So that you can start analyzing writing samples
 - Your own child
 - Students in your class
 - Children of relatives or friends



Dyslexia comes in degrees

- Most samples are from 2nd or 3rd graders
 - Who appear to have "classic" or moderate dyslexia
 - None of these samples show severe dyslexia
- Writing samples will vary
 - But they all have many of the classic errors



What I look for

- Capitalization
- Punctuation
- Spelling
- Common word and letter confusions
- Quality of written expression
 - Content is good if you can figure it out
 - Or way below their oral expression
- My detailed checklist is in the handout




b – d confusion

- Why?
 - Left-right confusion
- Watch for capital B and D
 - Even in the middle of words
- Also watch for
 - b – p
 - b – p – d
 - b – p – d – q



What I look for

- Capitalization
- Punctuation
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- Quality of written expression
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Reversals (s, a, c, z, j, etc.)

- Normal
 - During first 2 years of handwriting instruction
Kindergarten and first grade
- A warning sign of dyslexia
 - If they continue into second grade
- Also watch for number reversals
 - 7, 5, 9, 6, 3, 2

What to look for – dysgraphia

- Odd pencil grip
- Extreme pressure when holding on to pencil
- Letters do not consistently sit on the line
- Letter heights & relationships inconsistent
- Tails do not consistently go below the line
- Inconsistent slant
- Inconsistent spacing between words / letters

What I look for

- Reversals
- Capitalization
- Punctuation
- Spelling
- Dysgraphia
- Quality of written expression
 - Content is good if you can figure it out
 - Or way below their oral expression

Spelling Tests

Spelling Tests

- Some can pass the weekly spelling test
 - With hours of study every night
 - But can't spell those words the following week
- Some cannot pass it
 - Even with hours of study every night
- Let's take a look

Spelling Test #3

2nd grade

- Cursive
- Will reverse b's and d's
 - Even in cursive

So if you suspect dyslexia



Ask for a writing sample

- Composition – first draft
- Spelling test
- Worksheet



What to look for

- Reversals
- Capitalization
- Punctuation
- Spelling
- Dysgraphia
- Quality of written expression
 - Content is good if you can figure it out
 - Or way below their oral expression



Are there solutions?

- We must teach them to spell
 - as strongly as we teach them to read
- One-on-one intense tutoring
 - The Barton Reading & Spelling System
 - Or some other strong Orton-Gillingham based program
 - Now being called Structured Literacy
- Allow them to dictate their work
- Grade in-class written work on content only



Handout

- Handout with checklist
 - Susan@BrightSolutions.US
 - Subject: Handout Writing Sample



Questions

- Send them to me by email
 - Susan@BrightSolutions.US
- Or call me
 - 408-559-3652
 - 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. California time
 - Monday through Friday

Writing Sample Checklist

Incorrect capitalization

- Did not consistently capitalize the first word in a sentence
- Did not consistently capitalize the first letter in names or proper nouns
- Did not consistently capitalize I
- Capitalized words (or letters within words) that did not need a capital

Incorrect punctuation

- Did not put periods or question marks at appropriate spots
- Did not use commas correctly
- Did not use apostrophes correctly
- Did not use quotation marks correctly

Spelling errors

- Misspelled high frequency non-phonetic sight words
 - Misspelled very common purely phonetic words
 - Consonant sounds left out, inserted or just wrong
 - Wrote the correct letters in the wrong sequence
 - Messed up the vowel sounds
 - Wrote words or syllables without any vowels
 - Showed Silent-E confusion
 - Spelled the same word differently each time it was written
 - Homonym confusion
 - Did not apply suffix spelling rules
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- Common Confusions: b-d p-q g-j m-n**
 - Reversals of letters and/or numbers after 2 years of instruction & practice**

Content and Structure

- Highly repetitive sentence structure and wording
- Contains very few two-syllable words
- Contains basic simple vocabulary (not at all like oral vocabulary)
- Did not write 4 sentences (as requested)
- Despite the mistakes, the content is good.

Behavior and Emotional Reaction to the task

- Highly resistant or reluctant, claimed he/she could not do it.
- Stopped after writing a sentence or two. Needed coaxing to finish.
- Signs of frustration (tears, put head down onto table, felt defeated).
- Extreme relief when he/she finished the task.

Task took a long time

- Writing these ____ (2, 3, 4) sentences took ____ minutes.

When the child read it out loud

- Student did not notice any (or very few) of his mistakes.
- Student read what he wanted to write, not what he actually wrote.
- Student had trouble figuring out some of the words he had just written.

Dysgraphia

- Odd pencil grip
- Extreme pressure when writing
- Letters do not consistently sit on the line
- Letter heights and/or letter-height relationships are inconsistent
- Slant is inconsistent
- Tails do not consistently go below the line
- Inconsistent spacing between words, or between letters within words
- Poor or inconsistent letter or number formation